

XI'S VISIT

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Neighbors at top of diplomatic agenda

Trip seen as timely, critical for boosting region's confidence, providing certainty

By MO JINGXI
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As President Xi Jinping kicks off a three-nation visit to Southeast Asia on Monday, observers at home and abroad said the latest move of head-of-state diplomacy is a testament to China's long-term commitment to deepening all-around cooperation with neighboring countries in order to safeguard peace and stability in the region and beyond.

The five-day trip, during which Xi will visit Vietnam, Malaysia and Cambodia, is also a timely and critical one for boosting the confidence of countries in the region and providing more certainty for regional economic development amid the chaos brought by the United States' launch of a tariff war, they said.

Gu Jiayun, vice-dean of Beijing Foreign Studies University's School of Asian Studies, said that choosing Southeast Asia as the destination for this year's first head-of-state visit, days after Beijing held a central conference on work related to neighboring countries, shows the increasing importance attached by China to neighboring countries.

Neighboring countries have been China's priority in its diplomacy. The nation has engaged in cooperation with neighboring countries in line with the principle of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness put forward by Xi in 2013 to guide the country's neighborhood diplomacy.

Now China is the largest trading

President Xi Jinping to visit Vietnam, Malaysia and Cambodia

This is Xi's first trip abroad this year and holds major significance for the overall development of China's relations with the three countries and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations as a whole.



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partner of 18 neighboring countries. China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, a political and economic alliance of 10 member states, have been each other's largest trading partners for five consecutive years.

"The trip also demonstrates China's determination to continue to deepen all-around cooperation, strengthen exchanges in various fields, and jointly uphold peace

and stability with ASEAN countries," Gu said.

Luo Yongkun, a research fellow at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of International Relations, said the cooperation between China and ASEAN holds remarkable significance in stabilizing the region in a world with notably rising uncertainty and instability.

In the more than 30 years since the establishment of dialogue relations, China and ASEAN have enjoyed steadfast, steady and robust cooperation and have become a model, with the most dynamic and

fruitful cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region and the world, he said.

According to Luo, the Belt and Road cooperation between China and ASEAN countries has also delivered tangible benefits to local people.

Efforts to stabilize China's economic relationship with the region will not only benefit the two sides, but also inject stability into the economic development of the whole Asia-Pacific region, he added.

Gu said that China and neighboring countries, including Southeast Asian nations, share

common interests, concerns and values in the political, economic, trade, security, cultural and other fields.

"The coming into effect of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and the substantial conclusion of the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area 3.0, for example, have demonstrated neighboring countries' desire to work together with China to promote regional economic integration and address global economic uncertainties," he said.

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Xi, president of Indonesia hail 75 years of relations

By ZHAO JIA
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President Xi Jinping exchanged congratulations on Sunday with Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto over the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations, vowing to continue enriching the dimensions of the China-Indonesia community with a shared future with the features of the new era.

Xi said in his message that the efforts are aimed at providing an example of solidarity and mutual trust

between major developing countries, a model of common development and a vanguard of South-South cooperation, in order to make joint contributions to the cause of human progress.

Describing China and Indonesia as close neighbors across the sea and good partners sharing a common future, Xi said that he attaches great importance to the development of bilateral ties.

As China and Indonesia are major developing countries and key nations of the Global South, cooperation between them holds strategic and global significance, Xi emphasized.

China and Indonesia have stood together through thick and thin and engaged in sincere cooperation over the past 75 years, Xi said.

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Chinese philosophy offers antidote to protectionism

The Trump Doctrine, which has sent shock waves through the international community, is not a new phenomenon. Rather, it represents a resurgence of 19th-century imperialist traditions in the United States, echoing the theory of Manifest Destiny and the Monroe Doctrine. At its core, the Trump Doctrine seeks to maximize US' national interests with little regard for diplomatic niceties. Its focus on securing resources, controlling strategic trade routes, and even contemplating territorial expansion — evidenced by the peculiar remark on seizing control of Greenland — harks back to an era of brutal power politics.

Indeed, the US administration's preferred method of engagement is the blunt instrument of power politics. It has wielded the threat of trade wars and military action with alarming frequency, eschewing the cooperative approach. This strategy, however, is not without its perils. The imposition of tariffs on imports from China, Europe and other countries risks triggering a contraction in global trade, potentially precipitating a worldwide economic downturn.

Moreover, Washington's steadfast commitment to fossil fuels threatens to exacerbate climate change, with its attendant catastrophic consequences. By consistently favoring unilateralism, the current US administration is pushing the world toward a neo-19th century paradigm. This new

world order is characterized by incessant conflict and dominated by unbridled competition between a handful of major powers.

In this geopolitical landscape, China emerges as a major power capable of challenging US brutality. As the world's second-largest economy and leading in technological innovation, China is uniquely positioned to offer an alternative to the Trump Doctrine, although it faces a significant hurdle: the persistent ignorance of Western elites regarding Chinese culture. Sadly, many remain ensnared by the antiquated and racist "yellow peril" myth, viewing China primarily through the lens of threat and danger.

Contrary to Western perceptions, the desire for a peaceful world order is deeply ingrained in the culture of "the Central Kingdom". Its self-perception as a grand civilization engenders a quiet confidence that precludes the need for aggressive expansion. The traditional concept of *tianxia* — all under heaven — embodies an ideal of harmony that profoundly influences Chinese foreign policy. While not ignoring the realities of power, China seeks to extend its influence through cultural soft power and trade expansion rather than military might. This strong preference for harmony explains why, from a Chinese perspective, the use of force is seen as a failure. The truly efficient strategist, according to China's ancient mili-

WORLD WATCH

By Thomas Guenole

tarist Guiguzi's School of Diplomacy, achieves victory without resorting to violence — a mentality almost incomprehensible from the US viewpoint, which tends to glorify brute force.

China's alternative vision for global order is already manifested in initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative and the New Development Bank. These endeavors aim to construct a multipolar world order based on harmony amid diversity. In the face of US' protectionism and unilateralism, China has the opportunity — and perhaps the duty — to champion major cooperative multilateral initiatives, particularly in addressing global challenges such as climate change.

In this context, fostering Sino-European convergence on key issues could prove crucial. This is why China must counter Western misunderstandings by redoubling its soft power efforts in Europe. While the China Global Television Network and the Confucius Institutes represent progress, the establishment of a European network of think tanks that can look at China rationally and fairly could more effectively introduce the idea of a *tianxia* world into European public discourse.

The author is a political scientist and professor of international relations at the Paris campus of Schiller International University in France. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Tariff exemption highlights China's hub role

By MA SI and ZHONG NAN in Beijing and LIA ZHU in San Francisco

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China has called on the United States to decisively correct its mistake and fully abandon the erroneous approach of imposing "reciprocal tariffs", as experts said that the US government's decision to exempt major electronics from its sweeping tariff plan highlights China's crucial role as a world manufacturing hub for electronics and the US' heavy reliance on Asia's supply chains.

The comments came after US Customs and Border Protection announced late Friday that smartphones, computers, laptops, semiconductor devices, memory chips and flat panel displays are among exempted products.

On Sunday, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Commerce said: "We have noted that this marks the second adjustment the US has made to its policy since it postponed the imposition of high 'reciprocal tariffs' on certain trading partners on April 10. This can be seen as a small step toward correcting its erroneous unilateral practice of 'reciprocal tariffs'."

The exemptions will apply to the US government's steep "reciprocal tariffs" imposed on dozens of countries.

Zhang Li, president of the China Center for Information Industry Development, said the exemptions prove "how important China is to major US tech companies that rely heavily on the country for manufacturing and innovation."

It is also a recognition of the extreme difficulty that Washington faces in bringing manufacturing back to the US, Zhang added.

As the world's largest manufacturing country, China ranks first globally in terms of output for more than 40 percent of the world's 500 major industrial products, according to the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

Smartphones were the top US import from China in 2024, totaling \$41.7 billion, while Chinese-built laptops ranked second at \$33.1 billion, according to US Census Bureau data.

Los Angeles-based Webush Securities said on Saturday that with the tariff exclusion, big tech companies such as Apple, Nvidia, Microsoft and the broader tech industry can "breathe a huge sigh of relief this weekend into Monday".

Webush estimated that roughly

90 percent of Apple's iPhone production and assembly is based in China.

Bai Ming, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation in Beijing, warned about being overly optimistic on the exemption's impact.

Uncertainty is the biggest certainty when it comes to US tariff policies, and changes might happen at any time, Bai added.

Molson Hart, founder and president of Viahart, a US manufacturer of educational toys, said in a blog post that while US President Donald Trump's stated goal is to bring manufacturing back to the US and to "make America wealthy again", the tariffs may achieve the opposite, failing to return manufacturing while making the US poorer in the process.

The challenges to US manufacturing include weak industrial supply chains, lack of expertise and infrastructure, higher labor costs and the time required for "Made in America" production, according to Hart, who has experience in manufacturing in both China and the US. "The tariffs have frozen business activity because no one wants to take a big risk dependent on a policy that may change next week," he added.

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Kaleidoscope of culture

People line up to enter the Pasona Natureverse Pavilion on Sunday, the first day of the six-month-long 2025 World Exposition in Osaka, Japan. The expo features participation of 158 countries and regions and seven international organizations.

PHILIP FONG / AFP
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XI'S VISIT

New facility expands e-bike production

By YANG HAN in Hanoi
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At a store in Vietnam's northern province of Bac Giang, resident Bui Quang Thuy, 50, is choosing an electric motorcycle for himself and his daughter from the Chinese brand Yadea.

"Riding electric motorcycles is becoming a major trend," Thuy told China Daily. "I like the design of Yadea. I know it is good quality and comes with a smart function to allow operation via a mobile app."

Headquartered in Wuxi in East China's Jiangsu province, Yadea is a leading electric motorcycle manufacturer with accumulated sales of 100 million units as of last December, ranking it among the top globally in terms of sales volume.

It entered Vietnam, one of the fastest-growing economies in Asia, in 2014. In 2018, Yadea established its first factory in Bac Giang to provide customized electric motorcycles based on market demand, such as bikes with waterproofing and high-temperature resistance, and to develop a localized supply chain.

Seeing the opportunity brought by the Southeast Asian country's green transformation, Yadea is expanding its presence in Vietnam with a \$100 million investment to build a new production and assembly facility in Bac Giang.

"Vietnam has a population of over 100 million and more than 45 million registered motorcycles, so it is a true electric motorcycle powerhouse," said Liu Jia, general manager of Yadea Vietnam Co.

Noting that the Vietnamese government is actively promoting a transition to electric vehicles, Liu said this presents great opportunities for the electric two-wheeler market.

Motorcycles are the dominant mode of transportation for many people in Vietnam. Yet they remain one of the largest emission contributors in major cities such as Hanoi, the Vietnamese capital that often ranks high on the list of the world's most polluted cities by air-monitoring organization IQAir.

To address the issue, Vietnam has set a target that 22 percent of motorbikes will be powered by electricity by 2030, according to Vietnam News Agency.

The government also aims to make all vehicles powered by green energy by 2050 as part of its climate commitments to achieve net zero.

With an area of 232,200 square meters, Yadea's new factory is set to start operating in the fourth quarter this year, with an annual production of 2 million units.

The factory will include a research and development center that will bring together regional experts, according to Liu.

Speaking in fluent Mandarin, Le Thi Thanh Tam, who graduated from Hanoi University with a major in Chinese, said the experience she's gained at Yadea will significantly enhance her professional skills and career development.

Having worked at Yadea for three years, Tam has been promoted from a clerk for customs affairs to become the director of operations management.

"Chinese colleagues often share best practices from China, so I will study and adapt them to the local context and help ensure smooth communication between Vietnamese and Chinese colleagues," said Tam, who was sent to Yadea's Chinese headquarters for training.

Nguyen Nhu Minh joined Yadea after graduating from the Hanoi University of Industry. In two years, he has become a unit head of production management.

Minh said he feels proud when he sees people ride Yadea motorcycles on the road, as they may have come off the production line that he works at.

"I believe that the electric motorcycle is an industry of the future, so there will be a lot of opportunities for me," said Minh.

Yadea employs around 400 workers in Vietnam, with 95 percent being local hires. The new manufacturing facility is projected to create an additional 3,000 jobs.

For Yadea, Vietnam serves as both a gateway and a testing ground for global expansion, providing invaluable reference for the company's development in other overseas markets, said Liu, the general manager.

Liu said the company will continue to promote localized innovation, industrial upgrades and talent cultivation.

Noting Vietnam is planning to build the Lao Cai-Hanoi-Hai Phong railway that connects northern Vietnam with China, Liu said this will also help lower the production and supply chain cost for Yadea. It will also allow the Vietnam base to export to other countries in Southeast Asia to consolidate the regional effect of "Made in Vietnam" while enhancing the resilience of its global supply chain.



A Yadea electric motorcycle store in Bac Giang, Vietnam.
YANG HAN / CHINA DAILY



Trucks make their way through customs at the Guangxi Pingxiang Integrated Free Trade Zone in Pingxiang, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, near the China-Vietnam border. ZHOU HUA / XINHUA

China, Vietnam to consolidate trade ties

Complementary development, industry structures create profits for both sides

By ZHONG NAN
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The economic and trade ties between China and Vietnam are expected to rise to a new level, driven by the two countries' highly complementary trade structures, Vietnam's modernization drive and the growing influence of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, according to market watchers and exporters.

Amid rising protectionism and unilateral challenges, China and Vietnam are pressing ahead with industrial upgrading and digital transformation, positioning themselves to tap into new growth opportunities across key sectors such as advanced manufacturing, green energy, smart logistics, e-commerce and regional supply chain integration, they said.

United by common aspirations for sustainable growth and economic resilience, the two countries are on track to forge even deeper and more dynamic economic ties in the years to come, said Wan Zhe, a professor specializing in regional economic development at Beijing Normal University.

Bilateral business relations have witnessed remarkable progress, especially in recent years, with Vietnam introducing key national strategies such as the National Green Growth Strategy for 2021-2030, vision towards 2050; the National Strategy on R&D and Application of Artificial Intelligence; and the National Strategy for 4th Industrial Revolution.

Wan said that these forward-looking initiatives have significantly enhanced Vietnam's appeal as a destination for investment and innovation, attracting a substantial influx of Chinese and foreign capital and technologies over the

past several years.

"This growing synergy has laid a strong foundation for deeper economic and technological collaboration between the two countries," she added.

Vietnam has become a key overseas investment destination for China. In 2024, from January to August, Chinese companies invested \$1.97 billion in the Southeast Asian country, maintaining a rapid rate of growth, according to the latest data released by China's Ministry of Commerce.

Benefiting from a booming intermediate goods trade, the rising freight volume on the China-Vietnam Railway and substantial gains resulting from the RCEP and the Belt and Road Initiative, China-Vietnam trade surged 14.6 percent year-on-year to 1.85 trillion yuan (\$254.05 billion) in 2024, statistics from China's General Administration of Customs showed.

This momentum continued in the first two months of this year, with the value of bilateral trade rising 8.2 percent on an annual basis to 270.96 billion yuan, customs data showed.

China's exports to Vietnam include machinery, telecommunication equipment, electronic components, industrial raw materials, trains, ships, trucks, household appliances and construction materials.

In addition to agricultural and aquatic products such as seafood, fruits, coffee and rice, Vietnam's exports to China include smartphones, computers, rubber, footwear, garments and furniture.

In the medium to long term, China and Vietnam are more likely to deepen industrial complementarity and division of labor rather than engage in direct competition, said Gao Lingyun, a researcher at the Institute of World Economics and

Politics, which is affiliated with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing.

"This is because both countries are at different stages of development and have distinct strengths," said Gao, adding China leads in high-end manufacturing and technological capabilities, while Vietnam offers advantages in assembly industries and young and high-quality workers.

On top of this, free trade deals with various economies, such as the EU (European Union)-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement and Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, have opened up opportunities, he added.

Echoing that sentiment, Lan Qingxin, a professor specializing in cross-border investment studies at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, said that compared with other Southeast Asian countries as well as India and Mexico, Vietnam holds a competitive edge and market potential due to its proximity to China and its friendly foreign investment policies.

This complementary dynamic fosters a win-win partnership, reinforcing the depth and resilience of China-Vietnam economic ties, said Lan.

Ningbo Dafa Chemical Fiber Co, a textile and chemical raw materials manufacturer in Ningbo, Zhejiang province, has been actively exploring new possibilities in the Vietnamese market.

"Vietnam has a well-developed furniture manufacturing industry, which drives strong demand for textile yarns and synthetic fiber materials. Our products are mainly used for furniture padding and bedding production," said Wang Ling, the company's sales director.

Ningbo Dafa's exports to Vietnam grew by 10.3 percent year-on-year to 20.64 million yuan in the first two months of this year, according to Ningbo Customs.

routes and boost efficiency, with plans to gradually increase the frequency," Gong said, adding that expansion to other countries, such as Thailand and Laos, is also under consideration.

The efforts to deepen ASEAN integration have delivered tangible results.

Customs data shows the province's total import and export value rose 5.5 percent year-on-year to a record 615 billion yuan in 2024, with trade with ASEAN climbing by 7.7 percent to 79.12 billion yuan, according to a provincial news conference in January.

Hebei's trade with Vietnam, a key ASEAN partner, surged 39.2 percent to 16.23 billion yuan last year.

The province's agricultural imports totaled 43.96 billion yuan, including 4.08 billion yuan worth of fresh durian from Vietnam and Thailand — a 76.8 percent surge.

"Our trade relations are growing closer," Wang Yulan, an official with Shijiazhuang Customs, said at the news conference.

Robots signal tangible benefits of cooperation

By LIU KUN in Wuhan
and TAN GUOLING

As economic ties between China and Vietnam continue to deepen, bilateral trade and investment are yielding tangible benefits for businesses on both sides, with significant potential for further expansion, business executives and experts said.

Suzhou AGV Robot Co is engaged in the R&D, production and sales of logistics robots, with more than 150 patents, providing products to meet diversified needs. The company has more than 600 commercial clients around the world.

The company is committed to providing one-stop smart logistics solutions for both indoor and outdoor environments, while actively expanding into Southeast Asian markets, including Vietnam, it said.

"Our company provides smart logistics solutions to Vietnamese clients, helping them achieve low-cost and high-value digital transformation through technological empowerment and localized adaptation," said Liu Shengming, CEO of Suzhou AGV Robot.

These solutions not only help Vietnamese enterprises enhance efficiency, reduce costs and improve management in production logistics, but also combine technological innovation with tailored local services, enabling them to swiftly respond to market changes, seize development opportunities and strengthen market competitiveness, said Liu.

"Logistics robots developed by our branch in Tianmen, Hubei province, can easily carry goods along routes planned in advance by artificial intelligence. This is widely used to save labor costs in factory workshops and logistics warehouses as an intelligent porter," Liu added.

Smart logistics solutions are poised to trigger a series of effects in Vietnam, lowering production costs and accelerating the country's transition from a global manufacturing hub to an emerging digital economy market, which will benefit regional economic integration, he said.

Looking ahead, he said the company will further expand its Southeast Asian operations, with plans to establish a production base in Vietnam, aiming to strengthen localized service networks and drive digital transformation.

As economic cooperation between China and Vietnam continues to evolve, companies like Suzhou AGV Robot are poised to play a vital role in strengthening industrial ties and promoting sustainable development across the region.

"Chinese enterprises investing in Vietnam gain broader market access and cost efficiencies while leveraging geographic proximity to expand Southeast Asian operations," said Wang Peng, a researcher at the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences.

For Vietnamese counterparts, they can grasp increased commercial opportunities that foster technological exchange, innovation and enhance competitiveness, Wang said.

For Vietnam's domestic industries, these collaborations accelerate industrial upgrading by introducing advanced technologies and managerial expertise, generating substantial employment opportunities, he added.

China and Vietnam have broad prospects for economic development, with bilateral trade and economic cooperation poised to seize growing opportunities amid evolving global economic dynamics and deepening regional integration.

In the digital economy sector, Wang said that China and Vietnam can strengthen coordination, facilitate the integration of cross-border e-commerce with traditional industries and collaborate on advancing AI.

In infrastructure development, the two nations hold extensive cooperation potential in the Belt and Road Initiative and the Two Corridors and One Economic Circle strategy.

These collaborative efforts will fuel economic growth in both countries, deepen regional partnerships and promote economic integration across the Association of Southeast Asian Nations region, he said.

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Rail freight from Hebei makes way to Hanoi

By ZHANG YU in Shijiazhuang
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Hebei province is strengthening its role as a logistics hub for China-ASEAN trade, with the launch of an upgraded rail freight route aimed at streamlining cargo movement and cutting supply chain costs.

A freight train carrying castings, fasteners and grease products departed from Caozhuangzhen Freight Station in Handan on March 5, marking the official opening of a direct rail route linking to Vietnam. The route runs along the Hanhuang (Handan-Huanghua) Railway and connects the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region to Hanoi, the Vietnamese capital.

The service, as the province's first direct freight link to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations market this year, aims to streamline trade flows between North China and

Southeast Asia while reducing logistics costs for regional businesses, according to local authorities.

"This direct route cuts transit time by one to two days, enhancing our competitive edge in Vietnam," said Gong Yanjie, general manager of Handan-based Aijia (Hebei) Supply Chain Management Co.

According to Gong, the first freight train comprised 27 containers valued at approximately \$1.35 million, primarily sourced from enterprises in Handan and Xingtai, both cities in Hebei.

"While currently operating one-way, the next step is to introduce return cargo such as Vietnamese cassava starch and turmeric," Gong added.

The company, which operates within a bonded zone in Jize county, Handan, recently signed a cooperation memorandum with Vietnamese rail operators, establishing a

new logistics channel and platform for Sino-Vietnamese trade.

"We will leverage the advantages of the Jize Bonded Zone and Caozhuangzhen Freight Station. Through deepening collaboration with Vietnamese customs and railway authorities, we hope to reduce logistics costs and attract regional cargo to this route," he said.

The rail upgrades align with a strong start for Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei foreign trade this year, which saw exports hit 207.05 billion yuan (\$28.7 billion) in the first two months — a record high for the period, according to China Media Group.

Jize county, which sits about 400 kilometers southwest of downtown Beijing, attaches great importance to Sino-Vietnamese economic and trade cooperation.

Leveraging Caozhuangzhen Freight Station's infrastructure, the county has rolled out supportive

measures to facilitate trade channels with neighboring countries and the regular operation of ASEAN-bound freight trains.

Since the launch of the "Jize-Hanoi" rail link in May last year, a total of 22 freight trains have been dispatched.

This year, through proactive coordination, the ASEAN freight train — previously rerouted through Nanning Railway Station in the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region — now operates directly from Jize, Hebei to Hanoi, shortening the transit time.

It is expected that a regular train service to ASEAN countries will operate once a week later this year, transporting industrial products such as fasteners, rubber flooring, PVC boards and lubricants, alongside agricultural products, according to Gong.

"We will explore further measures to reduce logistics costs, optimize

XI'S VISIT

Memorial hall
a testament
to relationship

A school in Guilin helped educate many, including some of Vietnam's leaders

By YANG HAN in Hong Kong, ZHANG LI and SHI RUIPENG in Guilin, Guangxi

Even after half a century, Lu Meinian, 80, vividly remembers the time she worked as an interpreter at Guilin Yucai School, where many Vietnamese students received their education in China from the 1950s to the 1970s.

Lu began working at the school in Guilin, a city in South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, in 1971. During her three years there, she was mainly responsible for interpreting for senior officials from Vietnam.

More than 10,000 Vietnamese students received their education at the Yucai school in Guangxi, which borders Vietnam, during Vietnam's war against French occupation, from 1945 to 1954, and during its war against United States aggression, from 1955 to 1975.

Many of these students later took up leadership roles in Vietnam, including Le Kha Phieu, former general secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam Central Committee, according to organizers of the Vietnam School Memorial Hall, which was later established on the site of the school campus.

"China provided unprecedented support for the school," Lu told China Daily, recalling how the Chinese government even built a swimming pool — the only one in Guilin back then — for Vietnamese students and teachers.

As a living witness to the China-Vietnam friendship, Lu attended a special gathering of Vietnamese and Chinese alum in March in Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam.

At the event, To Lam, general secretary of the CPV Central Committee, emphasized the important role of students in shaping bilateral relations, as this year marks the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and Vietnam, and is also the China-Vietnam Year of People-to-People Exchanges.

In 2010, Guangxi Normal University established the memorial hall on the Yucai school site to commemorate history. At the inauguration ceremony, Nguyen Thien Nhan, then deputy prime minister of Vietnam and its minis-

ter of education and training, who is also an alumnus of the Yucai school, said that Vietnamese students have studied in different parts of the world, but there is only one memorial hall of the Vietnam School in Guangxi.

Bi Yanlong, curator of the Vietnam School Memorial Hall, said that the hall is "a historical testament to the traditional friendship between China and Vietnam".

"It serves as a link for the alumni to connect with their alma mater ... and a bridge in the new era for educational exchanges between China and Vietnam, and for the building of a China-Vietnam community with a shared future," he said.

Ngo Tue Quan, a museum guide at the memorial hall, said she feels proud each time she tells visitors about the school's storied history.

Quan was among the first group of Vietnamese students who pursued higher education in Guangxi. After graduation, she married a Chinese man and was recruited by the university as a teacher and interpreter.

"Since I became a museum guide, I got to know more about this chapter in the history of China-Vietnam relations," she said, adding that "some people even cry when they hear the story".

Building on the foundation laid by the Yucai school, Guangxi Normal University has developed different programs for Vietnamese students to pursue their academic goals and learn the Chinese language and culture, said Li Dongmei, director of the Office of International Cooperation and Exchanges at Guangxi Normal University.

"As of December 2024, our university has 275 enrolled Vietnamese students," she told China Daily.

The university is planning to develop bilingual teaching materials in Chinese and Vietnamese to allow students from both countries to better learn each other's languages, according to Li.

It also hopes to jointly establish laboratories to strengthen cooperation in green energy and digital technologies, she said.

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Two former students of Guilin Yucai School point to a group photo in which they are included during a visit to the Vietnam School Memorial Hall in Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region on Oct 23, 2024. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Clockwise from top left: A TV drama based on the Chinese classic *Journey to the West*, costume drama *The Legend of Shen Li*, crime thriller *Escape from the Trilateral Slopes*, female empowerment saga *The Tale of Rose*, revenge drama *The Double* and urban romance *The First Frost* have all been a hit with Vietnamese audiences in recent years. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Chinese dramas captivate Vietnamese audience

By XU FAN in Beijing and SHI RUIPENG in Nanning

Ngo Minh Quang, a 23-year-old Chinese language teacher in Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam, has been a fan of Chinese dramas over the years.

At just 5 years old, he was captivated by the fantastic world of *Journey to the West*, a classic drama adapted from the novel of the same name that was written during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

Describing the tale — a fictionalized account of the adventures of a Buddhist monk and his three powerful apprentices, including the heroic Monkey King — as his favorite drama, he told China Daily that he has watched it multiple times and even revisited it after beginning to learn Chinese.

"I used the drama to practice listening and reading, as well as to improve my understanding of grammar and words," he said, adding that the mythological story is not just entertainment, but also like a good friend drawing him deeper into ancient Chinese culture and history.

Quang, who is now introducing *Journey to the West* to his Vietnamese students, said the charm of most Chinese dramas lies in their exquisite costumes and lavish settings, which not only are beautiful, but also convey the country's cultural depth and values.

With its geographical closeness to China and centuries of cultural exchange, Vietnam has become one of the largest Asian markets for Chinese dramas, or C-dramas.

According to statistics from Youku, one of China's most popular streaming platforms and drama producers, more than 1,000 hours of over 30 dramas have been

Chinese films and television series have become a vital window through which Vietnamese audiences explore not only the richness of Chinese culture, but also the evolving facets of its modern society."

Zhou Xiaojiong, a specialist in charge of Vietnamese business at Guangxi Television

released in Vietnam in recent years. Among them, the fantasy series *Till the End of the Moon*, a romance tale known for its aesthetic style inspired by the Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes' murals, soared to the top of local ratings on several Vietnamese platforms such as ViOn during its premiere.

Some of the popular Youku-financed series streamed in Vietnam in recent years also include the female revenge-themed costume drama *The Double*, urban romance *The First Frost*, and crime tale *Escape from the Trilateral Slopes*.

"When Chinese films and TV series started to spread abroad between the late 1980s and early 1990s, Vietnam was one of the earliest overseas markets to import domestic content, propelling it to accumulate a large fan base for C-dramas over three decades," said Zhu Xinmei, director of the International Communication Research Institute at the Development Research Center of the

National Radio and Television Administration.

In 1993, *Kewang (Yearning)*, a drama set in Beijing during the transformative period of the 1980s, debuted on Vietnam Television, the country's largest broadcaster. It was hugely popular in Vietnam, exemplified by ratings as high as 90.78 percent — meaning that most locals watched the series at the time. More than 10 years later, Vietnam Television rescreened the series in response to viewers' enthusiasm, Shanghai-based Wenhui Daily reported.

Over the ensuing years, costume dramas — regarded by industry insiders as the most popular genre in Vietnam — have also made a splash in the country, with shows such as *My Fair Princess*, *Prime Minister Liu Luoguo* and *Yongzheng Dynasty*, all of which depict palace and court life during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

In 2015, *The Journey of Flower* — a romantic fantasy tale starring actress Zhao Liying and actor Wallace Huo — took Southeast Asia by storm, amassing more than 20 million views on Zing TV, one of the largest streaming platforms in Vietnam.

Zhao's popularity helped make her costume drama *The Legend of Shen Li* — a fantasy romance about a heroine from the fictional phoenix clan and a celestial being — a hit again in Vietnam last year.

With China's achievements in reform and opening-up and its efforts to alleviate poverty, television shows depicting realistic themes that reflect modern China's transition have also been well received in Vietnam, said Zhu, the director of the International Communication Research Institute.

Zhou Xiaojiong, a specialist in charge of Vietnamese business at

Guangxi Television, said China Hour, a program launched in 2018 to promote Chinese TV shows to foreign countries, has translated more than 800 episodes of more than 20 projects into Vietnamese.

Zhou said she has noticed that movies and TV dramas that soar in China usually gain recognition in Vietnam.

For instance, *Ne Zha 2*, China's biggest box-office sensation, "hasn't even been released in Vietnam yet, but I've already noticed a bunch of Vietnamese media covering it. Some local bloggers are even making short videos to introduce its highlights", she said.

Zhou, a Vietnamese major who graduated from Guangxi Minzu University, recalled that many of her Vietnamese friends, like her fellow Chinese, used to spend entire summer vacations glued to the television, captivated by iconic classics such as *Journey to the West* and *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Now grown up, they continue their passion through modern Chinese dramas like *Daughter of the Mountains* and *The Tale of Rose*.

Starring A-list actress Liu Yifei, *The Tale of Rose* — which follows the romantic experiences of Huang Yimei, or Rose — was broadcast on Vietnam Television in September. The series received praise from local media as a significant work highlighting the evolving and empowering portrayal of women.

"Chinese films and television series have become a vital window through which Vietnamese audiences explore not only the richness of Chinese culture, but also the evolving facets of its modern society," Zhou said.

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Ties: Prabowo expresses hope of cementing friendship

From page 1

The two sides achieved remarkable progress in bilateral relations and fostering deep-rooted friendship between the two peoples, he added.

Xi recalled his two meetings with Prabowo in Beijing last year, during which the two sides agreed to firmly

support each other's development visions, jointly advance their respective paths to modernization, and build a China-Indonesia community with a shared future with regional and global influence, in order to elevate the bilateral relations to new heights.

In his message, Prabowo said that Indonesia and China enjoy a time-honored friendship, with

their partnership remaining robust and dynamic.

He highlighted the rapid progress in cooperation regarding the "five pillars" of politics, economy, culture, maritime affairs and security, and expressed hope that both sides will continue to deepen cooperation and cement the friendship between the two peoples in order to make positive

contributions to peace and stability.

China is Indonesia's top trading partner and second-largest foreign investor, while Indonesia is China's second-largest investment destination among members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Bilateral trade reached \$147.8 billion in 2024, more than triple the volume of a decade ago.

Visit: Role of regional economic alliances to become more prominent

From page 1

Muhammad Habib, a researcher at the Department of International Relations of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Indonesia, said that President Xi's visit to Southeast Asia is timely and critical amid the ongoing tariff tensions.

"It provides an opportunity to reaffirm that this part of the world will not retreat from its commit-

ment to multilateralism and a global open economy," he said, adding that the visit also will allow the region to better coordinate responses to the trend of protectionism.

"It is in our collective interest to formulate international norms on nonharmful means for realizing global fair trade. China and Southeast Asia already have many platforms to do that, including various ASEAN-China economy-

related ministerial meetings, the ASEAN-China 3.0 FTA, and the RCEP. It is time to utilize them," he added.

Gu, the Beijing Foreign Studies University vice-dean, said that if Washington continues with its willful actions of practicing unilateralism and protectionism, challenging the global trade system, the role of regional economic alliances, which have advantages such as cul-

tural similarities and strong economic complementarity, will only become more prominent.

"By reducing trade barriers, optimizing resource allocation and coordinating policies, regional economic alliances can better maintain the stability of industrial and supply chains, enhance regional economic competitiveness and strengthen the ability to resist external risks," Gu said.

As important drivers of global economic recovery, China and ASEAN will be able to uphold the multilateral trading system and help stabilize the regional economy through strengthening openness and cooperation, thus maintaining regional peace and stability and boosting confidence in global economic recovery, Gu added.

Luo, from the Shanghai Academy

of Social Sciences, said, "It is stability and certainty for the future and for development that all parties are expecting from the Chinese president's visit."

He added that during the trip, the principle of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness guiding China's neighborhood diplomacy will help pool further consensus between China and neighboring countries in focusing on development and jointly building a peaceful, safe and secure, prosperous, beautiful and amicable home.

Editor's note: China Daily is publishing a series illustrating the country's efforts to achieve its carbon peak and carbon neutrality goals.

CHINA'S LOW-CARBON JOURNEY

Ecological restoration brings economic return

By LI PEIXUAN in Beijing and YUAN HUI in Hohhot

While renewable energy is playing an increasingly important role in China's green energy transition, coal mining still exists in some areas. In these areas, the government and local industry are taking steps to reduce the environmental impact, improve sustainable development and increase economic gains for local people.

In the coal-mining town of Narisong in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, locals say that not only is the air quality improving, but their wallets are getting fatter, too.

The town of around 30,000 people has undergone five years of green reforms, which have seen its ecological landscape improve and economic growth increase.

In Narisong's 19 villages and two communities, collectives earned 14.4 million yuan (\$2 million) in dividends last year alone, according to Hou Xianming, a member of the town's Party committee and chairman of the town's people's congress.

These dual gains stem from people-centered planning by the local government that started back in 2020. Back then, villages relying solely on mining struggled with unsustainable growth, while those without coal resources lagged behind. To holistically address ecological rehabilitation, sustainable industry development and income disparity, the government brought about the establishment of Juhe Industrial Co, Hou said.

The Juhe enterprise would carry out work associated with mitigating the environmental impact of mining, funded by villages and communities, according to government regulations.

The company also operates across sectors such as mine rehabilitation, environmental cleanup, equipment and land leasing, and waste management, said Hou.

Su Haixia, an official in the Ordos bureau of natural resources, said that mining companies must allocate funds for ecological restoration to local stakeholders. "Taking the green mine construction project as an example, coal companies must establish restoration funds and deposit about 90 million yuan per 10 million tons mined," Su said.

Subject to government evaluations on ecological restoration, coal mining companies could handle the restoration work themselves, or outsource such projects to specialized contractors like Juhe Industrial Co. With professional teams and flexible local hiring, these collaborations have facilitated the reclamation of almost 10,000 hectares of land in the town, according to Hou.

To date, Narisong has established 14 green mines — those that implement eco-friendly practices and technologies to reduce their environmental impact, with additional sites currently under

evaluation, Hou said.

Juhe Industrial Co has also created 198 stable jobs for local people in property services alone, boosting the average annual income by nearly 40,000 yuan for those people, according to Hou.

"I was previously working in long-haul transportation far from home, but now I've been able to secure a job in my hometown, earning over 5,000 yuan a month with social security benefits — an opportunity I wholeheartedly cherish," said Liu Meijun, a truck driver from Yangshita village in Narisong.

Senior residents have also benefited. "Some villagers in their early 60s remain physically robust and mentally sharp and still seek employment, but urban companies reject them mainly based on age concerns," said Hou. "However, we've chosen to hire them for suitable light work — enabling them to care for elderly parents at home while earning an income, a win-win for families and the community."

Last year, Juhe Industrial Co generated 200 million yuan in revenue with a net profit of 36 million yuan. A total of 10 percent of those profits go toward emergency assistance for residents affected by natural disasters or severe medical hardships, 40 percent go to village collective dividends and 50 percent for the company's future development, according to Hou.

On the land that has been revitalized and recovered, solar farms are being set up, as well as medicinal herb cultivation.

A 1.95-billion-yuan 400-megawatt solar project has been established by Man Shi Group and Hanxia New Energy in Narisong. Occupying 652 hectares, the project leases 521 hectares from Wutumun village and 130 hectares from Wutugou village at 3,000 yuan per hectare, offering annual incomes of 1.56 million yuan and 390,600 yuan, respectively, for these communities.

These new industries have generated around 500 local employment opportunities, according to Hou.

"I work in the reclaimed area of Changxu coal mine, mainly maintaining and inspecting solar panels. After deductions for social security, I earn over 4,000 yuan a month. I also earn steady rental income from leasing my land to the companies — life keeps getting better and better," said Nie Jianjun, a villager from Wutumun village in Narisong.

Guided by government initiatives, villagers are enjoying diversified income streams ranging from collective equity dividends and wages to land rental money. Moreover, companies purchase saplings cultivated by locals for their land restoration efforts, with the profits from these sales further bolstering the community's financial well-being, Hou added.

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Photovoltaic panels are installed on a reclaimed area of Changxu coal mine in Narisong, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, in August. The project uses green solar energy in the process of making hydrogen. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Top: An area reclaimed from a mine of Zhunneng Group is transformed into an eco-tourism park in Juungar Banner, Inner Mongolia autonomous region. LI ZHIPENG / XINHUA Above left: Geese swim in a lake at the park. LIAN ZHEN / XINHUA Above right: Some buildings in the park are designed in the shape of specialized mining trucks. LIAN ZHEN / XINHUA

Old mines given new purpose

Scars of industry in Inner Mongolia mitigated by green transformation

By LI PEIXUAN in Beijing and YUAN HUI in Hohhot

The once dirty coal mines in Juungar Banner in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region have been given a face-lift and transformed into areas of greenery and wildlife, fueling agriculture and eco-tourism thanks to the combined efforts of enterprises and government.

Land transformation

Zhunneng mine ecological park in the banner features the Heidaigou and Khar Us open-pit coal mines, once the largest mines in Asia with a total annual production capacity of 69 million metric tons.

The zone was once marked by the deep scars of coal extraction — sunken valleys and uneven slopes where the earth had settled after years of mining. The air often carried a haze of fine black dust, remnants of coal that lingered in the breeze and dulled the sunlight. The land, reshaped by industry, bore the signs of its past with thin soil, sparse vegetation and a delicate ecosystem struggling to recover, according to Inner Mongolia Daily.

Today, the great roar of mining operations is no longer heard, nor is dust seen in the air. Instead, there are verdant forests, a mix of grass, shrubs and trees, dotted with wildflowers, and wild partridges darting about.

This remarkable transformation stems from comprehensive environmental initiatives and substantial investments from Zhunneng Group, a subsidiary of China Energy Investment Corporation, according to Wang Yu, deputy director of Zhunneng Group's eco-protection department.

Wang said the company has invested 28.8 billion yuan (\$450 million) over 30 years in comprehensive ecological restoration, and has consistently taken systematic measures including soil improvement, targeted vegetation replanting, innovative water management systems and noise control.

The group has restored 6,567 hectares of land. The vegetation coverage rate has dramatically increased from 25 percent to over 85 percent, with all mining areas achieving complete 100 percent reclamation, according to Wang.

"The restored area has seen biodiversity flourish, with species numbers jumping from just over 30 to more than 300. Wildlife such as ruddy shelducks, foxes and lynxes have now settled in the revitalized ecosystem," Wang said.

Building on these ecological restoration achievements, Zhunneng Group has pioneered an eco-tourism initiative — Zhunneng mine ecological park — showcasing a sustainable model where environmental recovery and economic growth thrive in synergy, according to Wang.

Since starting operations in 2022, Zhunneng mine ecological park has welcomed approximately 270,000 visitors, with 130,000 last year alone, quickly becoming a

new landmark for tourism in Ordos, according to Xinhua News Agency.

Food repository

At the western edge of the Heidaigou open-pit coal mine, the blue sky forms a backdrop to a harmonious integration of ecology and agriculture, with employees sowing seeds across reclaimed fields.

Trucks loaded with farmyard manure depart one after another, heading toward the mining area to provide ample nutrients.

"In mid-April, we till the soil, form ridges and cover them with film, and in early May, we start phased planting of crops such as potatoes, corn, melons, peppers and eggplants on this reclaimed land," said Duan Guojun, leader of the landscaping service team at Zhunneng Group's production service center.

Duan told reporters that all the fruits and vegetables produced in the fields will be supplied to the employee cafeteria.

"These vegetables are free from chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Since we witness the entire growth process from sowing the seeds to harvesting, we feel totally safe eating them. This is the advantage that green mine construction has bestowed upon our employees," Li Haifeng, an employee of the landscaping team at Zhunneng Group's production service center, was quoted as saying by the Juungar Banner integrated media center.

Another employee, Wang Qiang, was also quoted as saying: "In the past, we had to go far to buy vegetables. Now, we can not only eat fresh, green vegetables in the cafeteria but also participate in the picking dur-

ing harvest season, experiencing the joy of labor."

These vegetables not only meet the daily needs of employees but also become an emotional bond connecting the enterprise and its workers, according to the Juungar Banner integrated media center.

Government efforts

The Juungar Banner government is promoting overall green mine construction throughout the banner. Since the implementation of Juungar Banner's three-year green mine construction action plan, 50 green mines have been built, said Jiao Zhanjun, a director at the ecology restoration department of the Juungar Banner bureau of natural resources.

Wildlife such as the black stork, roe deer and foxes, once rare to see, now frequently appear here. The wetlands along the Yellow River in Juungar Banner have become a popular port of call for migratory birds, with tens of thousands of previously rare species like swans, wild geese and cranes passing through this area, according to Xinhua.

"The significant increase in the number of migratory birds is a direct reflection of the continuous improvement of the ecological environment in Juungar Banner, which is closely linked to the long-term promotion of green mine construction," Xue Yong, head of the natural protection and wildlife management station of the Juungar Banner forestry and grassland bureau, was quoted as saying by Xinhua.

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Robots revolutionizing risky mining operations

By LI PEIXUAN in Beijing, YUAN HUI in Hohhot and ZHU XINGXIN in Taiyuan

Zhunneng Group and Jinneng Holding Shanxi Coal Industry Co, two major players in China's coal industry, are advancing unmanned systems, 5G networks and robotics, redefining efficiency, safety and sustainability.

At Zhunneng Group's Heidaigou

mine, 17 unmanned trucks glide across the open pit like giant robotic radio-controlled cars. Their cabins sit empty, yet their movements — guided by lasers and 5G — are precise.

Nearby, operator Fu Qiang leans back in a remote control room, maneuvering a 700-metric-ton hydraulic shovel with a joystick. "After a decade in dusty cabins, I never imagined I could operate equipment

from a quiet and comfortable office," he said while loading a mound of earth into a driverless truck. "Technology has truly transformed our lives."

Since safety officers exited cabins in May 2023, Heidaigou's unmanned fleet has completed 163,000 trips over 710,000 accident-free kilometers, moving 17.25 million cubic meters of coal, according to Qin Shaohua, deputy director of Heidaigou mine.

Compared to manual operations, driverless trucks boast superior precision, extended operational hours and unwavering stability. These robotic giants, equipped with lidar and millimeter-wave radar for automatic braking, navigate treacherous terrain at 85 percent of the efficiency of human drivers while minimizing safety risks tied to fatigue or human error, Qin said.

While autonomous fleets reshape surface mining at Heidaigou coal mine, subterranean innovation thrives at Jinneng Holding Shanxi Coal Industry Co.

At Jinneng's Tashan coal mine, silver-white inspection robots patrol dimly lit tunnels, their thermal cameras scanning for faults in real time.

The robots can not only move along the track independently but also collect moving images and audio during inspection and upload the data in real-time via 5G stations, according to Chen Jianlong, director

of the information management department at Tashan coal mine.

The robots are equipped with an advanced automatic recharging feature that allows them to return to the charging station whenever they detect low battery levels, said Wang Weiguang, a researcher at the mine.

The robots have enabled multiple positions to operate without on-site staff, reducing labor costs and the risk of casualties, according to Chen.

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CHINA



Tractors with furrows attached move across snow-covered fields in Heihe, Heilongjiang province, on March 19. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Spring planting boosted by satellites, new agricultural tech

Heilongjiang, other provinces expecting bumper crops to ensure nation's food security, **Tian Xuefei** and **Zhou Huiying** reports.

From the prospect of space seeds improving yields to satellite-guided fertilization of soil, farmers across the country are turning to advanced technology to ensure smooth planting this spring.

In recent years, northeast Heilongjiang province has focused on scientific and technological innovation, to improve its agricultural intelligence and methods. Farmers have also taken advantage of new digital technologies to boost grain output and help guarantee national food security.

In early March, at No 290 Company of Beidahuang Group, a large State-owned enterprise, technicians began testing agricultural machinery in preparation for spring planting.

When Xu Jianguo, 59, saw two new rice planters he was optimistic about another bumper harvest this year.

"The planters are equipped with the Beidou Navigation Satellite System, which makes planting more uniform and enables more efficient utilization of limited land," he said.

"The precision fertilization system on the planter can accurately apply fertilizers at multiple depths near the roots of rice seedlings during the rice transplanting stage. At various growth stages there will be sufficient nutrients available to promote vigorous growth of the seedlings."

Given the region's climate, the best time for transplanting rice to ensure a good harvest is from the middle of May to early June.

Xu, who has worked the land since 1995, said many farmers in the province are benefiting from the new technology.

"The machines can help us save a lot of time, and allow us to seize the best planting opportunities," he said. "With the help of modern agricultural technology and machinery, rice transplanting can be completed about three days earlier, saving about 20,000 yuan (\$2,720) in labor costs."

Last year, Xu generated 800,000 yuan in sales from his 33 hectares of rice. "I believe I will see high-quality rice and high yields this autumn," Xu confidently predicted.

In recent years, No 290 Company — which has 51,333 hectares of arable land for growing rice, corn and soybeans — increased its investment in modern agricultural machinery and equipment, upgrading from traditional methods. In 2024, it purchased 620 pieces of modern agricultural machinery.

The company now has a total of 27,000 agricultural machines and rice production has been fully mechanized.

Every year, the company holds a series of agricultural training courses to improve farmers' knowledge and give them guidance on new "intelligent agriculture" ideas.

Seasonal stirrings

With temperatures recently rising, spring plowing and preparation of land is well underway across the country.

Winter wheat crops in Shandong province in the east and Hebei province in the north, have entered a key growth phase.

In southern Guangdong province, nearly half of the 871,333 hectares of

early rice is ready for transplanting, while in Nanchang, in East China's Jiangxi province, early rice planting has begun across 130,666 hectares.

Temperatures have remained relatively low in Heilongjiang, but farmers have been busy preparing for spring plowing, and soaking and germinating seeds.

They are expecting yet another strong harvest this autumn.

In 2024, Heilongjiang saw its 21st consecutive bumper year, with a grain harvest of more than 80 million metric tons.

It was the first time the province's yield had exceeded 80 million, with Heilongjiang accounting for 11.3 percent of the country's total output. Its grain output has remained stable at over 75 million tons for 7 consecutive years, with the province ranking first in the country for 15 years in a row.

With a clean environment and the world's largest black soil area, Heilongjiang leads the nation in the amount of land devoted to planting rice, corn and soybeans, and boasts the highest annual yield of these crops.

Beidahuang is the name used to designate the fertile region including the Sanjiang Plain along the Heilong and Nenjiang rivers, in the north of Heilongjiang.

In recent years, the Beidahuang Group has worked hard on research and development of intelligent agricultural services.

The group has established 30 digital farm pilot programs and 14 smart agriculture demonstration bases.

It also deployed 11,000 agricultural sensors for intelligent seedling cultivation, intelligent water conservancy, intelligent fertilization and other agricultural applications.

Beidahuang has achieved a 99.7 percent mechanization rate on arable land and is making increasing use of advanced technology. Among the breakthroughs are a number of high-end intelligent agricultural tools, including an electric pneumatic planter.

The level of agricultural mechanization in Heilongjiang has reached 99.07 percent, ranking it first in the country.

Mutant space beans

Li Yanhua, a soybean expert and researcher at the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Northeast Institute of Geography and Agroecology in Hailun, Heilongjiang, was excited recently waiting for the harvest of a special batch of soybeans.

The crop was in an experimental field at the Sanya Nanfan Scientific and Research Breeding Base in the nation's southernmost province of Hainan, 4,000 kilometers from her institute.

Different from other soybean varieties, the seeds are the descendants of upland soybean seeds that were carried into space by the *Shijian 19*, a reusable, returnable experimental satellite, in September 2024. During the satellite's 13.5-day flight, breeding experiments were conducted on the soybeans.

A total of five high-quality varieties of the Dongsheng soybean were sent to space for mutagenesis experiments.

They were exposed to cosmic radiation and microgravity during the



Left: A staff member of Beidahuang Group levels the soil in preparation for rice seedlings in a greenhouse in Shuangyashan, Heilongjiang province, on March 19. WANG SONG / XINHUA Right: A worker unloads fertilizer at one of the group's farms in Harbin, capital of the province, on April 4. XINHUA



Left: Beidahuang Group technicians calibrate the Beidou Navigation Satellite System installed on a high-speed rice planter in Harbin on April 7. LI XING / XINHUA Right: Staff members of the group maintain the intelligent system of the unmanned rice planter in Shuangyashan on March 19. WANG SONG / XINHUA



A technician grows seedlings at a greenhouse of Heilongjiang Academy of Agricultural Sciences in Harbin on March 19. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

mission, resulting in genetic mutations.

Back on Earth, scientists evaluated the mutations. Some of the seeds had properties favored by farmers such as greater yield and better resistance to diseases.

While excited by the early prospects, Li said further research is needed on the space beans.

Every winter, she travels from Hailun to Sanya to cultivate new soybean varieties with her team at the base.

Over the past 34 years, the 59-year-old has selected and cultivated 21 high-yield and high-quality varieties of Dongsheng soybeans.

These varieties, which are rich in oil and protein, are now planted in more than 3.3 million hectares of farmland in Northeast China, helping to increase grain yield by 1 billion kilograms and benefiting local economies by 4 billion yuan.

"The process for new soybean varieties, from breeding to approval, usually takes 10 to 12 years," Li said. "To shorten this period, almost every year after the autumn harvest, I take seeds to Hainan for planting. I return to Heilongjiang for further experiments after the seeds are harvested the following spring, which helps add one or two growing seasons and shortens the breeding time."

Every year, she makes more than 300 soybean hybrid combinations

and cultivates them in an experimental field.

As China's major grain production area, Heilongjiang is home to the nation's largest soybean-producing zone.

In 2024, over 150,866 hectares of farmland were used to plant soybeans in Hailun, a major production hub for high-quality soybeans in the province. The total yield reached 392,000 tons, according to the local government.

"Soybeans have been cultivated for about 5,000 years, so we should develop the best seeds to improve our efficiency," Li said.

Top seeds

Seeds are key to agricultural modernization, experts said.

"Every year, the provincial finance department organizes 300 million yuan for seed industry innovation and development to continue to support its revitalization and development," said Meng Linghui, deputy director of the seed industry management office of Heilongjiang Provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

"Since 2021, the province has approved, and promoted, 1,710 new varieties of major crops, and built the country's largest cold-region crops and soybean germ-plasm resources bank, providing strong support for continuous and stable grain production and increases."

In recent years, Heilongjiang has carried out a series of initiatives to boost the seed industry, which have had significant success.

Zhang Yu, deputy director of the province's agriculture and rural affairs department, said Heilongjiang is at the forefront of conventional japonica rice and soybean breeding, with 15 varieties included in the national promotion catalog. This plays an important role in increasing yields, he said.

Heilongjiang has 549 crop-breeding enterprises, with seven companies in the top 10 in national soybean seed sales. Five companies are in the top 10 in national rice seed sales.

Zhang said Heilongjiang has established 19 national-level seed production counties and high-quality breeding bases. The total cultivated area of major grain crops exceeds 300,000 hectares, producing 1.4 million tons of high-quality seed crops annually, he said.

"To safeguard the interests of farmers and ensure national food security, the province thoroughly implemented the newly amended Seed Law, achieving the seed quality compliance rate of over 98 percent," Zhang said.

Black soil protection

Heilongjiang has also made remarkable progress in protecting its black soil resources.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization defines such soil as mineral soils with a black surface enriched with organic carbon at least 25 centimeters deep.

According to data from the National Plan for Soil and Water Conservation (2015-30), 109 million hectares of black soil, including around 29 million hectares of farmland, are in China's northeast, spanning the provinces of Heilongjiang, Jilin, Liaoning and the eastern part of the Inner Mongolia autonomous region.

With its high density of organic matter, black soil is highly suitable for growing crops. However, long-term cultivation and the overuse of fertilizers have caused degradation of black soil, threatening the environment and grain production.

Faced with the loss of black soil due to intensive cultivation and the effects of wind and rain, Heilongjiang authorities have taken measures such as covering the soil with straw after harvesting, increasing the amount of organic fertilizer, and encouraging crop rotation to tackle the issue.

Last year, Heilongjiang developed 693,333 hectares of high-standard farmland, integrating soil improvement with windbreak forest networks.

So far, the province has established nearly 1.33 million hectares of such farmland, the most in China. This year, it aims to add 780,000 more hectares.

"To realize the sustainable use of black soil, it is necessary to focus on scientific research of black soil conservation, nutrient balance and conservation tillage," said Han Xiaozeng, a researcher with the Northeast Institute of Geography and Agroecology of the CAS.

"These research results can provide important support for maintaining the fertility of black soil and improving the overall grain yield."

Protection methods include using maize straw for mulching, and increasing the application of organic fertilizers.

The province also promotes tailored strategies based on local conditions.

"In the western region of Heilongjiang, including Daqing and Qiqihar, where the climate is characterized by aridness and sandstorms, we have implemented conservation tillage — mainly no-tillage practices and straw covering — to address the protection of black soil," said Han.

"In the central part, from Harbin to Suihua, Beian, and further to Nenjiang, which falls in the black soil belt, the main focus is on protecting the black soil layer."

"In the Sanjiang Plain, where it is cold, low-lying and prone to flooding, the measures implemented mainly aim to increase the productivity of cultivated land," he added.

According to the Guideline on Protecting Black Soil in Northeast China (2017-30), by 2030, Northeast China's 16.67 million hectares of black soil will be better protected and see improvements to its fertility, ecology and farming facilities which will yield higher crop yields.

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From left: Students relax at a middle school in Lhokha city. ZHANG RUIFENG / XINHUA Deputies from the Xizang autonomous region discuss a proposal during the third session of the 14th National People's Congress held in Beijing in March. TENZIN SITEN / FOR CHINA DAILY A Tibetan Opera show is staged in Lhasa. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Human rights advance in leaps and bounds

By YUAN SHENGAO

Government of Xizang autonomous region has embarked on a wide-ranging program to improve people's lives, according to a white paper issued by the State Council

All-around and historic progress has been made in human rights in South-west China's Xizang autonomous region, according to a white paper released in late March.

The document, titled "Human Rights in Xizang in the New Era", was released by the State Council Information Office at a news conference held on March 28 in Lhasa, capital city of the autonomous region.

The Communist Party of China and the Chinese government have implemented effective measures to develop the economy; improve living standards and people's well-being; promote ethnic unity and progress; and protect the basic rights of all the people in the region since Xizang's peaceful liberation in 1951, it said.

Since the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012, respecting and protecting human rights were made an important part of the CPC Central Committee's guidelines for the governance of the region, according to the document.

The CPC has maintained a people-centered approach to human rights and a commitment to ensuring human rights through development, and has vigorously promoted whole-process people's democracy, it said.

The Party has strengthened the legal protection of human rights, and coordinated efforts to increase people's civil and political rights, as well as economic, social and cultural rights, so as to achieve well-rounded development and common prosperity for all people from all ethnic groups, according to the white paper.

Today, Xizang enjoys political stability, ethnic unity, economic development, social harmony, and friendly relations among different religions, the document said.

Its environment is sound, and local people are content with their work and daily lives. This progress represents a remarkable achievement in protecting human rights on the snowy plateau, it said.

The white paper said residents in Xizang have enjoyed all-around democratic rights since the 1950s.

In Xizang, people's democratic rights are ensured with democracy practiced in the spheres of elections, political consultation, administration and supervision.

Local democracy is also ensured by the regional ethnic autonomy system. There are 42,153 deputies to people's congresses at four levels in Xizang, 89.2 percent of whom are Tibetan or from other ethnic groups.

As for economic and social rights, multiple sets of data showcased significant accomplishments.

The average life expectancy in the region rose from 68.17 years in 2010 to 72.19 years in 2020. The medical and health service has now achieved full coverage across the region.

Xizang's road network has nearly doubled in length in 12 years. Meanwhile, every town or township is covered by the 5G wireless network, with 2.14 million 5G mobile phone users.

By the end of 2019, all 628,000 people registered as poor in the region had been lifted out of poverty. In 2024, the per capita net income of those lifted out of poverty in Xizang increased by more than 12.5 percent.

Relocation initiative
Relocating residents from areas at high altitudes with an adverse natural environment to regions with better living conditions is an innovative practice in Xizang.

Rigzin is a resident in a new settlement in Gurum township, located in the district of Doilungdechen in Lhasa. The building where his family lives is a new, two-story Tibetan-style house equipped with electric appliances like a refrigerator, a washing machine, a big TV and air conditioners, as well as utilities such as water,



The second highway winds through the hilly county of Metog, which connects it with the rest of the Xizang autonomous region. Metog was the last county in China to have access to highways. DONG ZHIXIONG / XINHUA

electricity and gas. Rigzin's family used to make a living herding on a pasture in Rongma township of Nyima county, which is a high-altitude area with difficult living conditions.

"Back in Rongma, a small TV set and a small machine for making butter were the only electric appliances in my family," Rigzin said. "And there were no telecom facilities. If you wanted to make a phone call or use your WeChat, you needed to go to the township seat some 30 kilometers away."

In June 2018, a total of 262 households in Rongma, an area with an average altitude of more than 4,800 meters, were relocated to Gurum township at a much lower altitude.

According to Tashi Sangmo, head of the Rongma township government, Rongma is in the heart of the Changtang Nature Reserve, the largest of its kind in China.

Due to the high altitude, harsh natural environment and underdeveloped healthcare and public facilities, many residents in Rongma were victims of various high altitude-induced diseases. The average life span was lower than that of the autonomous region as a whole.

She said moving people out of the region is beneficial to both humans and the environment.

"We noticed Rongma has seen improvement in its environment over the past few years, with increases in vegetation and wildlife," the official said. "And people relocated to the lower-altitude Gurum township now enjoy a better environment for their health and are being offered more job and business opportunities."

Both Rigzin and his wife Karma had developed chronic diseases in Rongma as a result of living for a long period of time in a high-altitude area.

As an arthrolithiasis patient, Rigzin has deformed hand joints, making it impossible for him to do heavy manual work.

Karma suffers from Kaschin-Beck disease, an illness unique to plateau regions. Fortunately, she received surgery in a hospital in Doilungdechen in 2024. "The treatment cost a total of 100,000 yuan (\$13,690) and about 80,000 yuan was covered by the government's new rural cooperative (medical care assistance system)," Karma said.

Despite their inability to do heavy work, Rigzin and Karma said their



Clockwise from top left: Two children play a game in their new settlement in Gurum, Doilungdechen district, Lhasa. JOGOD / XINHUA Students play football at a school in Zada county. LIU XIAODONG / FOR CHINA DAILY Monks in a monastery in Xizang discuss Buddhist teachings. TENZIN SITEN / FOR CHINA DAILY As a result of decades of efforts in environmental protection, the Xizang autonomous region remains one of the most pristine lands in the world. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

family revenue increased compared with that in Rongma.

"Back in Rongma, the per capita income of our family, mainly from animal herding, was about 15,000 yuan a year," Rigzin said. "And now the government pays every resident 15,000 yuan a year as an ecological compensation subsidy. And there are also dividends from the Rongma township cooperative."

Better access to education

In Xizang, children's right to education has been protected and safeguarded.

Education is a cornerstone of sustainable development and human rights protection. Recognizing its importance, Xizang became the first provincial-level region in China to implement a 15-year publicly funded education system, ranging from kindergarten to senior middle school. This initiative has expanded access to education, particularly benefiting children in remote areas while reducing financial burdens on families.

By 2024, there were 3,618 schools at various levels and of different types, and 970,000 students on campus, accounting for more than 25 percent of Xizang's total population. The average length of education among new workforce entrants has increased to 13.1 years, reflecting a strong emphasis on cultivating a knowledgeable and skilled population.

Since 1985, Xizang has implemented a "Three Guarantees" policy for education. It provides food, accommodation and school expenses for preschool to senior middle school students who come from farming and herding households and impoverished urban families.

The annual subsidy under the framework has been growing steadily over the decades. The figure reached 5,620 yuan per person in 2024, benefiting 714,300 students.

Ngawang Wangdu is a teacher at Sinopec Primary School in Palgon county, Nagchu city. Working there for two decades, he said he is a witness to progress in local education. At

his school, students are enjoying improved educational resources. The implementation of "Three Guarantees" has led to the overall development of the local education sector.

"The 'Three Guarantees' policy has addressed parents' concern in tuition, accommodation and other schooling costs, increasing their willingness to send children to schools," Ngawang Wangdu said, adding that 100 percent of school-age children in the neighborhood have been enrolled.

"The guarantee of children's rights to education means unlimited possibilities for their future development," he said.

Protecting culture

Moreover, the cultural rights of all ethnic groups in Xizang remain protected. For example, the Tibetan language is widely used in publishing, media and daily life. By the end of 2024, Xizang had 17 periodicals and 11 newspapers in Tibetan and had published 46.85 million copies of 8,794 Tibetan-language books.

The autonomous region puts a special emphasis on the protection of local cultural assets, especially those that fall into the category of intangible cultural heritage.

During 2012-24, the central government and the government of Xizang invested a total of 473 million yuan in protecting and developing ICH. The autonomous region now has 2,760 ICH items at various levels and 1,668 ICH inheritors.

The epic of King Gesar, the Tibetan Opera and the Lum medicinal bathing of Sowa Rigpa have been included in UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The protection of the King Gesar epic is a shining example of Xizang's ICH protection. The tale of King Gesar is a great epic jointly created by people of multiple ethnic groups. It's now told and sung in Xizang and other provinces and autonomous regions in China.

The tales were mainly told by minstrels who traveled from place to place and gathered many interesting stories. As they told the tales of King Gesar, they would mix in stories they heard from different places and share them with the local herders. The epic of King Gesar is considered one of the longest "living" epics in the world. For centuries, storytellers have continued to sing it, weaving their own narratives into the ancient tale.

Sonam Tashi has worked at the Gesar research center of the Xizang Autonomous Region Academy of Social Sciences since 2016. He said he has been a witness to the protection and development of the art over the past decade.

"A decade ago, performers would simply sing verses from the King Gesar epic while seated or standing, often found in pastoral areas," he said. Today, however, these guardians of the Gesar epic tradition can be seen in teahouses, restaurants and theaters in urban areas, thanks to the sustained support from governments at all levels. And young inheritors of this art are adding some modern elements into the ancient epic.

The researcher said central and local authorities have attached great importance to the protection and development of the epic. Under their support, the Xizang Academy of Social Sciences has devoted great energy to preserving and passing down this ancient art. It has collected various versions based on narrations by artists in different regions of the country and published 23 copies of works relating to King Gesar tales.

In Xizang, residents also enjoy freedom in religious beliefs. Xizang is home to more than 1,700 sites for Tibetan Buddhism, providing ample space for the spiritual practices of the Tibetan people. Furthermore, monks and nuns are now included in comprehensive social welfare programs, including medical insurance, pensions and accident insurance — an unprecedented development in Tibetan Buddhism.

The government has also enacted policies to ensure that religious practices and religion-related traditions are respected and integrated into the broader societal framework. These measures affirm China's commitment to upholding the religious and cultural rights of all ethnic groups within its borders.

The news conference for the release of the white paper was attended by more than 130 journalists from more than 50 domestic and overseas media outlets.

At the conference, Gama Cedain, chairman of the Xizang autonomous region, said that there is "no perfect tense but progressive tense instead" in the field of human rights protection. He added that "concerted efforts will be taken to write a new chapter of human rights protection" to meet the expectations of all people in Xizang.

ADVERTORIAL

WORLD

China shows cultural depth at Osaka expo

Pavilion introduces philosophies of harmony between humanity, nature

By JIANG XUEQING in Osaka, Japan
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The China Pavilion at the 2025 World Expo in Osaka, Japan, opened on Sunday as the expo began welcoming visitors for its months-long run, striking notes that well echo the message delivered a day earlier by Japanese Emperor Naruhito: a sustainable future for mankind.

This year's expo, themed "Designing Future Society for Our Lives", is drawing participation from 158 countries and regions and seven international organizations.

Ren Hongbin, chairman of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, said the China Pavilion offers a good illustration of the theme, incorporating three major elements of Chinese culture — bamboo, Chinese characters, and scrolls.

Speaking at the pavilion's opening, Ren said the Chinese exhibition follows a narrative structure of "past-present-future", allowing visitors to experience ancient Chinese philosophies of harmony between humanity and nature, appreciate the beauty of modern China with its clear waters and green mountains, and envision a future society where people and nature coexist in harmony.

"Today's world, like the expo site, should be a vibrant garden of peace, friendship, sincere exchange, mutual learning and flourishing diversity. International cooperation should be guided by the spirit of equal consultation and mutual benefit, actively promoting an equal and orderly multipolar world and an inclusive and beneficial globalization."

At the expo's opening ceremony on Saturday, Naruhito said he sincerely hopes that Expo 2025 Osaka "will serve as an opportunity for people around the world to respect not only their own lives but also the lives of those around them and the various forms of life that exist in nature, and to be inspired to work together to create a sustainable future."

He also expressed the hope that through this expo, children will deepen their understanding of countries, regions and people around the world, and by experiencing next-generation technologies and global efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals,

they will begin to think about the future of society.

Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba said that in a post-pandemic world of division, it is extremely meaningful for people from around the globe to come together, discuss the theme of life, and be exposed to cutting-edge technology, diverse ways of thinking and cultures.

Chinese Ambassador to Japan Wu Jiahao said on Sunday that he hopes visitors to the expo will gain a deeper understanding of China's 5,000-year-old civilization as well as the vibrant image of modern China — a nation that is friendly, enterprising and open.

"No matter how the external environment changes, China's door of openness will only open wider," Wu said.

Powerful message

Dimitri Kerkentzes, secretary-general of the Bureau International des Expositions — the organization responsible for overseeing World Expos — said the China Pavilion sends a powerful message calling on people to work together and live in harmony with nature and with each other as members of the global community.

"With this magnificent bamboo-inspired pavilion, China is presenting its vision of building a community of life for man and nature within a future society of green development," he said.

Running through Oct 13, the expo is expected to draw about 28 million visitors, said the Japan Association for the 2025 World Exposition.

Masakazu Tokura, chairman of the association, expressed hope that the expo would serve as a catalyst for new connections and innovations.

He encouraged friends from China to seize the opportunity to engage deeply with global visitors, inspire one another, and work together to create a blueprint for a "future society that shines with life".

Tokura, who is also chairman of the Japan Business Federation, said China is one of Japan's most important bilateral partners. The federation will actively support efforts to foster healthy, stable Japan-China relations, especially in economic exchange and cooperation.

The expo is "a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity" to bring together people, cultures, ideas and values from around the world to create a greater future society, he said.

Rescue bid



South Korean rescuers search for a missing worker in a collapsed subway construction site in Gwangmyeong, southwest of the capital Seoul, on Saturday. Another worker, trapped about 30 meters underground in the rubble for about 13 hours, has been rescued, fire officials said. EPA-EFE / YONHAP

Beijing, Jakarta expand partnerships

By ZHAO JIA
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Building on the success of the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway, China and Indonesia are actively exploring new areas for collaboration in various sectors, with industries such as digital economy and green development emerging as priorities, says Chinese Ambassador to Indonesia Wang Lutong.

Sunday marked the 75th anniversary of the establishment of China-Indonesia diplomatic relations. Wang said the bilateral ties have maintained strong momentum, with mutually beneficial cooperation delivering tangible benefits to both countries and peoples, and this partnership has become a model among Global South nations.

The bilateral trade has surpassed \$100 billion for many consecutive years, reaching \$147.8 billion last year — more than tripling the volume from a decade ago, he said.

Wang cited the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway — first of its kind in Southeast Asia — as an example of high-quality Belt and Road cooperation. It has cut travel time between the two cities from more than three hours to just 40 minutes and has transported more than 8 million passengers.

"The success of the railway shows the strengths of high-quality infrastructure cooperation between China and Indonesia and has boosted confidence among other members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in partnering with China on similar projects," Wang said.

As China is deepening reform and expanding high-level opening-up, he said Chinese modernization will offer greater prospects for cooperation and shared growth dividends to Indonesia and the broader region.

Nothing Chinese modernization is driven by innovation, he said



Wang Lutong

China's leadership in the digital economy, artificial intelligence, and green, low-carbon development will inject new dynamic into the bilateral partnership.

"I'm particularly struck by the deep cultural affinity Indonesians have toward China, and there is widespread interest in Chinese language, cuisine and martial arts," he said, adding Indonesian academia and think tanks have shown great interest in China's development philosophies and global initiatives.

Rooted in a strong foundation of friendship, China-Indonesia relations enjoy vast room for future cooperation, he said.

As two major developing countries and representatives of the Global South, Wang said China-Indonesia relations transcend bilateral ties, particularly in today's complex geopolitical landscape and amid rising protectionism.

"Both nations uphold the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, safeguard free trade and the multilateral system, and jointly support the China-proposed Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative, and Global Civilization Initiative."

China and Indonesia have "enormous potential for multilateral cooperation" and share the responsibility of uniting Global South nations, upholding justice, and advancing a more equitable global governance system, he added.

Wang highlighted the benefits of tariff reductions under the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, which have "strengthened regional industrial and supply chains and boosted the competitiveness of Indonesian exports."

Last month, Indonesia decided to join the New Development Bank, following its full membership in BRICS in January.

Going forward, China and Indonesia are well-positioned to deepen all-round, multilevel cooperation within BRICS, injecting greater momentum to regional peace and prosperity, Wang said.

Iran and US say nuclear discussions 'constructive'

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong
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Iran and the United States concluded a preliminary round of what both parties called "constructive" nuclear talks in Oman on Saturday and will meet again a week later.

Iran's Foreign Minister Seyyed Abbas Araghchi said the indirect talks with US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff were "constructive and promising."

"The talks were conducted in an atmosphere of mutual respect. I elaborated Iran's viewpoints in a firm yet forward-looking manner. Both sides decided to continue the process in a matter of days," he said.

A White House statement said the discussions "were very positive and constructive."

Witkoff's "direct communication today was a step forward in achieving a mutually beneficial outcome," it said. "The sides agreed to meet again next Saturday."

Iran's First Vice-President Mohammad Reza Aref said Teheran's stance and strategy in negotiations are clear, and it seeks to uphold the inalienable rights of the Iranian people, reported the Islamic Republic News Agency.

Oman's foreign minister, Sayyid Badr bin Hamud bin Hamood Al-Busaidi, thanked his Iranian counterpart and the US for "this engagement which took place in a friendly atmosphere, conducive to bridging viewpoints and ultimately achieving regional and global peace, security and stability."

"We will continue to work together and put further efforts to assist in arriving at this goal," he said on X.

'Push-pull pattern'

Dina Yulianti Sulaeman, director of the Indonesia Center for Middle East Studies, told China Daily: "Although these negotiations seem to be a positive step, we must realize that the US has had a push-pull pattern in its relations with Iran. Every time there is progress, new pressure always appears, whether in the form of additional sanctions or military maneuvers in the Gulf."

Iran has repeatedly stated it is open to dialogue "if the process is fair and not accompanied by threats or sanctions", she said.

"Therefore, the US' credibility is questionable here. Does it really want a diplomatic solution, or does it just want to force Iran to submit?"

"Besides involving Oman, the role of independent countries such as China is crucial to ensure this process does not become an arena for unilateral pressure."

Saturday's high-level talks were the first in years after the US unilaterally withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, in 2018.

US' \$800 de minimis exemption for goods from China to end on May 2

By BELINDA ROBINSON
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US shoppers will face higher prices to purchase goods from China after the de minimis exemption — a tax-free loophole that allowed low-cost parcels to enter the US duty-free — is scheduled to end in May.

US President Donald Trump signed an executive order on April 2 to eliminate de minimis at 12:01 am EDT on May 2. An amendment was issued on April 8, to include higher duties on goods.

The administration initially described its move as a "critical step in countering the ongoing health emergency posed by the illicit flow of synthetic opioids into the US."

At least 75 percent of all the packages that came to the US under de minimis were from China in 2018, according to Baird Equity Research. Today it is estimated at 60 percent.

Discount stores Temu and Shein must now adapt quickly to new market conditions to remain relevant with US shoppers if de

minimis is eliminated, said an analyst.

"They really should begin to change and develop a new business model," Z. John Zhang, a professor of marketing at The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, told China Daily. "There is absolutely no other country in the world that's been better at taking advantage of this loophole."

The end of the rule comes as concerns grow over how prices might rise due to the tit-for-tat trade dispute that has seen the US place tariffs on Chinese imports that could reach up to 145 percent.

China responded Friday with its own 125 percent levy on US goods, starting April 12.

On April 9, Trump paused tariffs on all countries for 90 days except on China, which he raised.

In fiscal year 2024, at least 1.36 billion shipments utilized de minimis, an increase of 637 million in 2020, according to US Customs and Border Protection (CBP).

Together, Shein and Temu account for 17 percent of the US. The

"I think given the current environment that if all tariffs and actions stick, you can imagine that the only choices really [for Shein and Temu are] probably automation somehow and production in the US."

Z. John Zhang, professor of marketing at The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania

change will impact shoppers who are used to getting low-cost items such as T-shirts, dresses, electronics and other supplies.

Hundreds of TikTok users expressed concern over the change under a video by Chelsea, an influencer in Detroit.

"Shein needs to open stores

here!" posted one user. "Glad I ordered my clothes last week," wrote another.

"Buy now before May!" said a third.

US consumer sentiment fell 11 percent to 50.8 percent, the University of Michigan found in its latest survey. It was the second-lowest figure on record since 1952.

To further deal with changes to de minimis, Zhang suggested that it will be important for Chinese companies to move closer to American customers. That means they could build more warehouses in the United States and maintain the best parts of fast fashion such as quick delivery.

Both Shein and Temu, which have a plethora of Chinese vendors, have begun to work with US sellers and also bring more inventory locally to get to customers nearby.

The push forward to end the tax-free loophole came after the US commerce secretary confirmed to the Trump administration that sufficient systems were in place to collect tariff revenue.

The original executive order details that any "imported goods

sent through means other than the international postal network that are valued at or under \$800 and that would otherwise qualify for the de minimis exemption will be subject to all applicable duties, which shall be paid in accordance."

The US Postal Service must report the shipments to CBP and collect duty payment and remit duties.

The April 8 amendment to the order increased the duties on the low-value parcels to be collected from 30 percent to 90 percent and from \$25 to \$75, and an increase on June 1, from \$50 to \$150.

"With China, it's not just fast fashion that matters," Zhang said. "In this case, it is really all kinds of different goods under the value of \$800."

In 2018, Chinese exports under de minimis totaled \$5.3 billion but rose rapidly to \$66 billion in 2023, the Congressional Research Service found. Many of the parcels are shipped directly from China to customers.

It could cost Americans between \$1 billion and \$13 billion if the rule is eliminated,

according to "The Value of de Minimis Imports" by the UCLA Department of Economics and Yale University.

The de minimis exemption, Section 321 of the Tariff Act of 1930, was first created in 1938. Its initial aim was to allow Americans to bring back souvenirs from abroad.

It allowed for small packages valued at less than \$5 (the equivalent of \$160 today) to get to customers quickly and efficiently. The value allowed went from \$200 in 1994 to \$800 in 2016 per person, per day.

The Trump administration initially paused the rule in February, disrupting deliveries as the Postal Service announced it would stop accepting parcels from China temporarily. It reversed course 12 hours later, and service was resumed.

"I think given the current environment that if all tariffs and actions stick, you can imagine that the only choices really [for Shein and Temu are] probably automation somehow and production in the US. That is probably the longer-term planning that they need to do."

WORLD

Spain seeks to strengthen bilateral ties with China

By LIU SHENGNAN
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Spain is keen to continue strengthening its relationship with China and to help bring the European Union and China closer together, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said.

"Spain supports more balanced EU-China relations, seeking negotiated solutions to our existing differences and greater cooperation in areas of common interest," Sanchez said at a news conference in Beijing on Friday as he concluded a two-day trip to China.

This year's 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the EU and China provided the perfect opportunity to work on those goals, he said.

His visit came just days after the US administration announced sweeping tariffs on countries including China and European nations.

The visit, the third by Sanchez to China in three years, coincided with the 20th anniversary of Spain and China entering into a comprehensive strategic partnership.

"All these visits reflect the mutual interest that both the Spanish and Chinese governments have in maintaining high-level political dialogue — a dialogue that allows us to continue developing a positive agenda between our countries based on mutual respect and trust," Sanchez said.

One of his main aims during the visit was to strengthen and balance the economic and trade relationship between Spain and China, he said, adding the two governments are committed to promoting their partnership in the years to come.

During his stay, the two countries signed seven agreements on the export of Spanish agricultural, cosmetics and healthcare products to China, as well as working more closely together in the fields

of culture, education and science.

"We have always been committed to open trade and maximizing bilateral exchanges," Sanchez said. "We will thus continue advocating for a more balanced economic relationship and the promotion of reciprocal investments for mutual benefit. Since June 2018, we have agreed on 10 agri-food protocols with China, and we are committed to further opening the Chinese market to more high-quality Spanish products."

High-value-added sectors

On Friday, Sanchez met representatives of a dozen big Chinese companies that have invested in Spain's automotive, battery and renewables sectors or are considering doing so.

"These are high-value-added sectors that align with our priorities, and they view Spain as an attractive investment destination," Sanchez said. "We seek productive investments that generate added value locally and quality skilled employment, thereby strengthening the competitiveness of both countries."

"Spain is aware that we are experiencing a complex period in international relations — a time when we must broaden our horizons and redouble efforts to preserve peace, openness and progress in the fight against major global challenges."

Spain considers China as a key partner in tackling major global issues such as climate change and development financing, and upholding the UN-centered multilateral system, respecting international law and pursuing just and lasting peace, he said.



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Palestinian children receive food at a distribution center in Nuseirat, central Gaza Strip, on Friday. ABDEL KAREEM HANA / AP

Patients evacuated as Israel hits Gaza hospital

GAZA/JERUSALEM — Israel struck a hospital in northern Gaza early Sunday, forcing patients to evacuate as attacks intensified across the Strip.

The predawn strike hit Al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza City, after Israel issued an evacuation warning, according to Gaza's ministry of health. One patient died during the evacuation because medical staff were unable to provide urgent care, it said.

Hours later, a separate strike on a car in Deir al-Balah in central Gaza killed at least seven people, according to staff at the morgue of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, which received the bodies.

Israel said it struck a command and control center used by Hamas at the hospital to plan and execute attacks against Israelis.

The strikes came hours after Israel's defense minister said that military activity would rapidly expand across Gaza and that people would have to evacuate from "fighting zones".

Israel also announced on Saturday the completion of the Morag Corridor, cutting off the southern city of Rafah from the rest of Gaza, with the military saying it would soon expand "vigorously" in most of the small coastal territory.

Israeli authorities have vowed to pressure Hamas to release the remaining 59 hostages, 24

believed to be alive, and accept proposed new ceasefire terms.

Director of Al-Ahli Hospital, Fadel Naim, said they were warned of the attack before it was struck. In a post on X, he wrote that the emergency room, pharmacy and surrounding buildings were severely damaged, impacting more than 100 patients and dozens of medical staff.

Hamas said on Saturday that it is positive about any Gaza ceasefire proposal that guarantees a permanent ceasefire and a complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip.

In a statement, Hamas said that such a proposal must also ensure an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people and include a serious prisoner exchange deal.

A Hamas delegation headed to Cairo on Saturday at the invitation of Egypt to meet with mediators from Qatar and Egypt, as part of ongoing efforts to reach an agreement and halt Israeli attacks in Gaza, it added.

The US military carried out 10 airstrikes across northern Yemen late Saturday night, Houthi-run al-Masirah TV reported.

Yemen's Houthi group said in a statement on Friday that it launched fresh drone attacks at the city of Tel Aviv in central Israel.

AGENCIES—XINHUA



Ready for takeoff

The 38th edition of the International Kite Festival in Berck-sur-Mer, France, began on Saturday. Thousands of kites with different shapes and sizes will be flying in the sky. Professionals from around the world are taking part in the festival, which will run until April 21.

JOHAN BEN AZZOUZ / MAXPPP

Levy pause exposes US frailties

Decision to exempt electronics reflects industry's inability to meet demand

By LIA ZHU in San Francisco
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The US administration's decision to exempt key electronics from steep tariffs reflects a sobering reality: the United States' electronics industry is no longer equipped to meet domestic demand independently.

Analysts say the industry faces significant hurdles, including high labor costs and limited production capacity.

The Donald Trump administration late on Friday announced exemptions from steep tariffs on key electronics, including laptops, smartphones, and related components predominantly imported from China.

Dan Ives, a technology analyst on Wall Street for over two decades, called the exemptions "the massive relief for market and tech stocks heading into Sunday night".

"Finally the news US tech investors were dreaming of ... chips/smartphones/computers exempt from tariffs. US Big Tech spoke and the White House made the right move at the right time," Ives posted on X.

Economists have warned that tariff costs may ultimately be passed on to consumers. This concern has prompted many people in the US to rush to purchase big-ticket items such as cars and electronics.

Consumer sentiment plunged 11 percent this month to 50.8, the second-lowest reading on records dat-

ing back to 1952, according to a University of Michigan survey released on Friday.

The Budget Lab at Yale, a nonpartisan policy research center, estimated that all tariffs enacted in 2025 could increase the overall price level by 2.3 percent in the short term, translating to an average loss of purchasing power of \$3,800 per household annually.

Trump's "reciprocal tariffs" have raised fears of a US recession and drawn criticism from some members of his own party.

Joe Walsh, a former Republican congressman, wrote on social media platform X, "More exemptions, so the question remains: If tariffs are so great, why so many exemptions?"

Other critics of Trump's tariffs also took to X on Saturday to comment on the decision and highlight the administration's previous statements regarding the tariffs.

US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick said on April 6 that tariffs would enable smartphone manufacturing to occur in the US, supporting Trump's campaign promise to bring manufacturing jobs back to the US.

"The army of millions and millions of human beings screwing in little screws to make iPhones, that kind of thing is going to come to America," Lutnick said during an appearance on CBS' *Face the Nation*.

However, the electronics exemption suggests manufacturers will no

longer have immediate incentives to consider producing smartphones and other electronics in the US.

The exemption list includes products the US heavily relies on for overseas production, with limited domestic manufacturing capacity and high consumer demand.

For instance, almost all iPhones are manufactured in China, according to the Council on Foreign Relations, although Apple has shifted some production to India. Apple itself doesn't operate the factories that produce its electronics; it relies on contract manufacturers, notably Foxconn.

According to the US International Trade Commission, China has long been the US' largest source of electronic products. In 2023, the most recent year with available data, China was the top source of the US' imported electronic products. The US imported \$145.9 billion worth of electronic products from China, accounting for nearly 25 percent of all electronic product imports.

Heavy reliance

While there is a trend toward reshoring electronics manufacturing to the US, experts note that some products cannot be easily manufactured or sourced domestically, thus increasing the production costs in US factories. Semiconductors and microchips are among the products heavily outsourced to factories in Asia due to lower costs.

The US domestic electronics sector already faces significant challenges, and the new tariffs would substantially increase manufactur-

ing costs, according to an MNI report on US electronics manufacturing released this week.

The implementation of new tariffs, particularly on imports from major trading partners such as China, Canada, and Mexico, poses a substantial threat to the US electronics sector. Increased tariffs on critical components and raw materials would likely translate directly into higher production costs for domestic manufacturers, potentially leading to price increases for consumers and significant disruptions in established global supply chains, the report said.

It also highlighted the rising labor costs as a major challenge to the US electronics sector, with projections of a 3.3 percent increase in labor costs in 2025.

Alan Murphy, founder and CEO of Sea-Intelligence, told CNBC: "Higher-margin and more technical goods, such as electronics, machinery, medical equipment, and pharmaceuticals cannot easily move sourcing, as setting up highly technical manufacturing takes time and considerable capital."

Murphy said that none of the Chinese-based producers his firm has spoken with are currently actively considering moving production to the US, partly due to uncertainty about the administration's ultimate goals.

"The yo-yo tactic of changing tariff rates on a daily basis does nothing but create uncertainty," he said.

Zhao Huanxin in Washington contributed to this story.

Digital trade offers alternative amid tariff tensions

By YIFAN XU in Washington
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Digital trade offers potential avenues for global economic cooperation even as traditional trade faces new tensions, notably US tariffs, experts said.

Panelists explored how trade in the digital realm is reshaping international markets, presenting both significant opportunities and governance challenges during a recent event hosted by the Peterson Institute for International Economics, or PIIE, and the TradeExpertettes network.

At the panel discussion titled "Shaping tomorrow's global economy: The transformative power and potential of digital trade", they underscored digital trade's potential as a force for growth and cooperation, even amid global economic uncertainty and evolving technological landscapes.

While acknowledging recent attention on tariffs, Cecilia Malmstrom, a nonresident senior fellow at the PIIE who moderated the discussion, suggested looking toward more "constructive areas".

"What can we do to support and facilitate digital trade? How can we

draw the potential of digital trade in innovation and growth?"

Hanna Norberg, founder and president of TradeExpertettes, said that digital trade is a fundamental shift from traditional commerce based on tangible goods crossing physical borders. In the digital world, goods are often intangible, residing "in the cloud", and transactions can involve data exchange rather than monetary payment.

"Every time your heart beats, you're actually doing international trade in this new scenario," Norberg said, referencing data collected by smartwatches. This shift challenges existing rules built for physical trade and blurs lines with domestic policy areas like regulation and taxation, she said.

Joshua Meltzer, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, contrasted the potential of digital trade with recent US tariff actions, which he characterized as part of possibly "the most fundamental change in US international economic policy since ... World War II". He said it is a move away from the long-standing principle of comparative advantage.

Meltzer said that digital trade, espe-

cially involving artificial intelligence, represents a "huge opportunity space", though it lacks the established economic frameworks of traditional trade and faces complexities like national security concerns and heavy concentration in the US private sector.

Meltzer said that in his observation, the US policy on digital trade itself has fluctuated, citing ambitious digital chapters in agreements like the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement followed by a pullback from supporting global data flow rules during the Joe Biden administration. He added that the current administration might shift policy again, possibly signaled by recent trade reports.

Payment hurdles

Cross-border payments are a critical element, said Martin Chorzempa, a PIIE senior fellow. In his view, while domestic digital payments have advanced, international payments face hurdles due to varying regulations across jurisdictions. Chorzempa also said that the global system relies heavily on the US dollar, with about half of world trade and 75 percent of Asian trade invoiced in the

currency, making access to US financial infrastructure vital.

Chorzempa said that the unpredictability of the US, including tariffs, could spur other nations "to continue integrating with each other" and explore non-dollar payment systems. However, barriers like data localization rules and market access limits hinder progress. He said that solutions include adopting international standards and pursuing digital trade agreements, while also warning that countries might retaliate against US tariffs by targeting US services trade, where the US has a surplus.

Kat Duffy, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, talked about the centrality of data flow to the modern economy and AI. She highlighted the historical US bipartisan commitment to a "free global interoperable and secure internet", questioning whether that leadership role can be maintained amid current foreign policy shifts.

Duffy said that trade experts need to engage more deeply with internet governance issues, which are often handled in separate silos. She urged more cross-disciplinary collaboration.

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BUSINESS

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Spotlight on AI as future game changer

China fostering own vision of development through reliable, efficient application of artificial intelligence tools across industry sectors

Audiences enjoy a robot show during the opening ceremony of 2025 Zhongguancun Forum Annual Conference, with the annual theme of "New Quality Productive Forces and Global Science and Technology Cooperation", in Beijing on March 27. LI XIN / XINHUA

By CHENG YU
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Delegates and visitors to the Zhongguancun Forum, a key technology event held in Beijing recently, were in for a surprise when they arrived at the venue late last month.

As they stepped in, they were greeted not by ushers in uniform, but by a coordinated team of robots that mimicked human expressions, answered queries and translated conversations in real time.

In the shadow of a series of bullying (tariffs) imposed by the Trump administration earlier this month, China is doubling down on what may be its most potent counterstrike: AI. From breakthrough chips to frontier models rivaling the West's best to humanoid robots, China's AI breakthroughs could stand out to be a potential game changer, industry experts said.

Elsewhere at the venue, a robot with a friendly voice and precise movements guided guests to a coffee corner where a robotic barista brewed fresh beverages. And, once the coffee was ready, another humanoid robot delivered it directly to the guest.

While other robots played chess with visitors or displayed their brush calligraphy skills with serene focus, some robotic dogs darted easily through the crowd of visitors.

This was just one of several events held last month where artificial intelligence took center stage.

In March, China saw a series of major events, including the two sessions, or the annual gatherings of the country's top legislature and political advisory body; the Zhongguancun Forum; and the China Development Forum in Beijing, as well as the Boao Forum for Asia in Hainan province.

In fact, several AI-related panel discussions at the Boao and Zhongguancun forums saw packed houses, with attendees filling up every seat and some even standing to hear out the participants.

This overwhelming interest in AI mirrors the prominence of the nascent sector across the nation, displaying a vivid picture of China's technological future.

Industry experts said China is fostering its own vision for the development of AI through the reliable and efficient application of AI tools across a wide range of industries, a

path that differs wisely from that of the United States.

Turing Award winner Joseph Sifakis said at the Zhongguancun Forum that China is crafting its own AI vision, distinct from that of the US.

"China has a solid and extensive industrial base and a unified domestic market. This enables the country to develop more reliable AI solutions that better align with the needs of the real economy, especially in the long-awaited transition to autonomous driving," he said.

Sifakis noted that China's strong industrial foundation, in particular, gives it an edge while industries such as self-driving vehicles, smart cities, smart factories and intelligent farms present more opportunities. "If developed well, (all these) will give China a dominant position in industrial AI," he said.

Kai-Fu Lee, a prominent AI expert and chairman and CEO of investment company Sinovation Ventures, said China has reached its "DeepSeek moment". He predicted that 2025 would mark a breakout year for AI applications and large-scale model deployment in China.

Lee recalled that about nine months ago, he had expressed frustration over China's lack of a "ChatGPT moment", as promising Chinese AI models at the time failed to stand out and spark nationwide adoption.

"However, DeepSeek has changed that landscape. Its success has awakened the Chinese market, ushering in a new AI era for the country," he said.



Left: Humanoid robots work at a smart factory of electric car manufacturer Zeekr in Ningbo, Zhejiang province, in March. CHINA NEWS SERVICE
Right: A visitor experiences a pair of AR learning glasses during the 2025 Zhongguancun Forum Annual Conference in Beijing on March 27. WANG JING / CHINA DAILY

China has a solid and extensive industrial base and a unified domestic market. This enables the country to develop more reliable AI solutions that better align with the needs of the real economy, especially in the long-awaited transition to autonomous driving."

Joseph Sifakis, Turing Award winner

According to Lee, DeepSeek's rise proves that "closed-source AI has no future", and only open-source development will drive greater progress.

"As AI scaling laws shift from the pretraining stage to the inference stage, AI applications will accelerate exponentially this year," he said.

Scaling laws describe how the performance of AI systems improves as the size of the training data, model parameters or computational resources increase.

Kuang Ziping, founding partner of Qiming Venture Partners, a top-tier Chinese venture capital firm, echoed that sentiment.

While the first generation of AI saw fragmented innovation, the second generation — dubbed "AI 2.0" — will be built on infrastructure, scalability and real-world application, he said.

"There's still a huge gap in foundational infrastructure investment," Kuang said. "But the application layer is poised for explosive growth."

From smart education and

autonomous driving to embodied intelligence and hardware, he said the sectors that successfully integrate AI will define the future.

Zhu Xiaohu, managing partner at GSR Ventures, emphasized that generative AI must prioritize one principle above all — application is king.

Startups, he said, must embrace open-source ecosystems and rapidly iterate their products in vertical industries. The most effective businesses, he predicted, will not rely on AI alone, but on "AI plus human" hybrid models that combine intelligence with nuanced delivery capabilities.

As excitement around AI innovation builds in China, it also collides with geopolitical headwinds, especially after the nation, a major trading partner of the US, was hit with several rounds of so-called reciprocal tariffs since April, in addition to a 20 percent tariff imposed earlier this year.

Last month, the US also added dozens of additional Chinese entities, including the Beijing Academy

of Artificial Intelligence and tech firm Inspur Group, to its export restrictions list.

But, the world is big enough for hundreds of countries, including the US and China, to codevelop AI, and Washington's sanctions on high-tech sectors will only steel Beijing's resolve to drive homegrown innovations, said industry experts and company executives.

During a panel discussion at Boao Forum for Asia, Zeng Yi, a member of the United Nations' high-level advisory body on AI and a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Institute of Automation, said: "The future of AI is not decided by a handful of countries, but by nearly 200 countries and regions. The world is big enough to embrace both the US and China to codevelop AI."

Zheng Yongnian, dean of the School of Public Policy at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (Shenzhen), criticized as "unwise" the inclusion of Chinese companies in restrictive measures aimed at hindering China's AI progress.

"China possesses significant advantages in application scenarios, with the government actively promoting the AI Plus strategy to expedite technological implementation. US sanctions on technologies have, paradoxically, spurred China to intensify investments in these areas and foster indigenous innovation," Zheng said.

"If China's AI technologies continue to evolve at the current pace, the US might find itself relying on China's original innovations in certain sectors within 10 to 15 years," he added.

Carl Fey, a professor of strategy at BI Norwegian Business School, said that while US tech restrictions may cause short-term pain for China, they will ultimately compel the latter to fortify its technological base and sharpen its global competitiveness.

Fey warned that measures like tariffs and export bans not only slow global tech progress, but also backfire by accelerating domestic innovation.

A group of experts cited DeepSeek as a case in point — a low-cost, open-source AI model that is transforming the industry landscape. DeepSeek's accessible architecture enables rapid deployment, and widespread use may reshape the AI future globally, a vision where AI, like water or electricity, becomes a basic utility available to everyone.

Jiang Xiaojuan, a professor at the University of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said that DeepSeek is breaking monopolies and ushering in a new era of vigorous competition, converting technical know-how into industrial might.

"In a competitive market, these challenges will naturally be resolved by the forces of the market itself," Jiang said.

Gao Xuefeng, founder and CEO of AI data infrastructure company Fabarta, said that after DeepSeek's breakthrough, many Chinese companies no longer hesitate to invest in AI.

"Every few months, new technological advancements emerge. Companies can't afford to wait; they must integrate AI into their business and industry now," Gao said, adding that every sector in China can be re-imagined through AI in the coming years.

Amid rising AI enthusiasm, Wang Zhongyuan, head of the Beijing Academy of Artificial Intelligence, a leading nonprofit AI institute, said that DeepSeek has indeed delivered impressive results, proving that China can train large-scale AI models parallel to ChatGPT 4 despite limited computing power.

Regarding artificial general intelligence, in which an AI system can match or exceed the cognitive abilities of humans in any real-world task, Wang said that the industry is still far from achieving such capabilities. "I think we are still at least five to 10 years, or even longer, from reaching that level," he added.

With DeepSeek, balance of tech power is clearly shifting

REPORTER'S LOG

By Cheng Yu

Recently, when I realized that even my 60-year-old father was using DeepSeek, I knew something had changed fundamentally.

My dad, a cautious man by nature, is no fan of digital trends. He rarely watches short videos and has never been intrigued enough to download Douyin or Kuaishou. His time online is mostly spent browsing news and current affairs — no flashy

distractions, just information.

So, when I found him enthusiastically tapping away on his phone one evening, asking DeepSeek for the latest market updates, I paused.

In China, DeepSeek is somehow finding its way into the most unlikely hands — from healthcare to capital markets to daily routines, it has found its niche everywhere.

People are using it to search for information, ask questions, chat, organize work — and, believe it or not, even tell fortunes.

That was the moment I realized the world had changed. Technology, once distant and complicated, has become something familiar, something human. And behind this technology, China is closing its gap with

the United States in terms of AI development.

The 2025 Stanford HAI Report on AI, released recently, is packed with statistics and projections about global AI trends, but one headline stands out: The performance gap between top Chinese and US AI models has narrowed considerably.

The world's balance of technological power is shifting, and DeepSeek is partly the reason.

Two years ago, I remember writing a story asking "When will China have its own version of ChatGPT?"

That seemed like a distant dream, an ambition that would take years to materialize. But in 2025, that dream has become a reality.

According to the Stanford Univer-

sity report, the performance gap between top Chinese and US models, which had been a staggering 20 percent in 2023, has shrunk to nearly nothing — 0.3 percent in 2025.

Open-weight models, like DeepSeek, have made jaw-dropping progress.

The gap between open-weight and closed-source giants, which was 8 percent in 2024, has dropped to just 1.7 percent in 2025. In the tech world, those numbers are nothing short of revolutionary.

Of course, the US still holds the lead when it comes to the big names in AI.

In 2024, 90 percent of the world's most well-known models had been developed by commercial firms, with the US contributing 40 of them and

China only 15. But what is undeniable now is the fact that the gap between the best models is evaporating.

In 2024, the difference between the best and the 10th-best model was 12 percent. Today, that difference has shrunk to just 5 percent, signaling a convergence in AI capabilities. We are no longer trailing behind.

And as if that isn't enough, DeepSeek's growth trajectory has been staggering. The numbers don't lie.

According to analytics from aitoos.xyz, DeepSeek has overtaken OpenAI's ChatGPT in monthly website visits.

In February alone, it recorded 525 million visits, surpassing ChatGPT's 500 million. For a product that had

only launched its V3 large model a few months earlier, these numbers are mind-blowing.

By March, DeepSeek had already captured 6.58 percent of the global AI tools market. To put that in perspective, ChatGPT still led with 43 percent, but DeepSeek had already approached AI tool Canva (8 percent).

It is clear — this isn't just a domestic phenomenon anymore. DeepSeek has gone global, and it is only getting started.

Watching my father use DeepSeek made me realize that technology is no longer a foreign language. It is something we can all speak.

A silent revolution has taken root, quietly changing how we live, work, and interact with the world. And as I thought about those 525 million visits, I couldn't help but wonder — just how many fathers are embarking on this AI journey?

BUSINESSINSIGHT

EAGLE EYE

By Chen Wenling

United States tariff policies inevitable to fail

The United States has been imposing tariffs without regard for international trade rules or established practices. However, countries around the world are now pushing back against US President Donald Trump's disruptive high-tariff policies, indicating the inevitable failure of his approach.

While China faces challenges due to the tariff hikes, the sky is not falling. China has maintained a steady growth trajectory over the past few decades, with its massive economic scale serving as a powerful buffer against external pressure.

By placing domestic demand at the forefront, China can create a more stable and self-sustaining economic growth model that is less vulnerable to the volatility of global trade vagaries.

Moreover, last year, the two-way trade volume between China and the US still reached \$688.2 billion. Even under Trump's first term which began in 2017, the lowest bilateral trade volume stood at about \$688.5 billion, which shows that all the tariff hikes ultimately amounted to little more than a Pyrrhic victory.

The fact that the trade volume has maintained the same level as it was eight years ago is a clear testament to the resilience of the China-US economic relationship. Imposing tariffs cannot completely sever the deep-rooted trade and economic connections between the two countries.

The Trump administration's relentless pursuit of imposing high tariffs on trading partners, particularly China, was driven by the single-minded goal of "making America great again".

Washington's strategy involved levying high tariffs on imports, while simultaneously implementing significant tax cuts domestically, with the belief that this would create a powerful economic advantage for the US to "lure" companies and manufacturing industries to "return" to the country.

This misguided belief that the White House could simply use tariffs to eliminate trade deficits and weaken the manufacturing capabilities of other countries, such as China, demonstrates a profound lack of understanding of the modern global economy.

It is absolutely certain that the US will not be able to achieve its intended objectives. The Peterson Institute for International Economics, a US think tank, has conducted



CAI MENG / CHINA DAILY

a very thorough analysis of the Trump 1.0 tariffs on China, and found that 92.3 percent of the burden was shouldered by US businesses and consumers.

This means that the previous tariff war against China had backfired. Now the Trump administration has picked up the failed weapon again and has even increased its intensity, which will only lead the US further down the path of error.

The US inflation rate, which had previously been at low levels, has now surged past 2.8 percent. The continuation of Trump's blanket approach of tariff hikes targeting

friends and foes alike could quickly send the US inflation rate spiraling back upward.

During the Biden administration (2021-25), the US inflation rate reached as high as 9.1 percent at its peak. If Trump's "contributions" were to have a greater impact, there is a real possibility that the US inflation rate could even surpass double digits in the future.

The increasing anticipation of a high level of inflation might leave the US Federal Reserve few choices but to aggressively raise interest rates, which in turn would likely exacerbate the fiscal deficit and debt

burden of the US government.

In addition to the growing debt burden, the combination of high inflation and low growth projections for the US economy further exacerbates the risks of a potential recession during the Trump administration.

Goldman Sachs economists have already revised the US growth rate in 2025 down to 1.7 percent. The latest United Nations forecast puts US economic growth at just 1.9 percent, a significant drop from the previous expectations of around 2.8 percent.

These downward adjustments underscore the potential for

Trump's tariffs and shocks to trigger a recession, rather than the promised economic boom.

Going forward, it's imperative for Beijing to not only resolve China's problems from China's perspective, but also take a global stance to address the world's problems.

Efforts should be made to safeguard the authority of the World Trade Organization, a platform that can provide a rules-based framework for resolving trade disputes, despite the US refusal to recognize its legitimacy. It's important to build a global consensus against trade wars, forming a united front of

countries opposed to Trump's disruptive tactics.

China should strengthen communication and coordination with other economies deeply affected by the trade tensions — such as Canada, Mexico and the European Union — to adopt different countermeasures tailored to their unique circumstances.

For Chinese products and materials that are especially crucial to the US, such as core components, key raw materials and rare earth resources, China can follow the examples of countries like Canada and impose tariffs as high as 250 percent to 390 percent.

When the US is hit by the backlash of its own tariff weapon, it may find its days are not going to be easy.

China should continue to support enterprises to expand their global presence, leveraging their industrial strengths and global operational capabilities to reconfigure global industrial and supply networks. This is not only a strategy to counter trade tensions, but also a higher level of openness and engagement with the global economy.

It is not entirely impossible for Beijing and Washington to reach an equal trade agreement, but the US must demonstrate sincerity and willingness to engage on the basis of parity, fairness and mutual benefit.

In January 2020, China and the US reached the first phase of a trade agreement, which Trump at the time signed. Building upon this foundation to negotiate a second-stage trade deal is a viable option.

However, any evaluation of the phase-one trade agreement must exclude three crucial factors that have dramatically altered the context — the impact of the three-year pandemic on the agreement's implementation, the US government's sweeping bans on high-tech exports to China, and the effects of the Biden administration's "small yard, high fence" strategy and the subsequent withdrawal of US tech giants, which have disrupted China's supply chains and trade volumes.

The world's two largest economies should serve as role models for the principle of equal trade, rather than the US adopting a condescending attitude and using coercive tactics in its negotiations with China.

Such an approach, rooted in mutual respect and a commitment to win-win outcomes, is the only path forward to achieving a truly comprehensive and beneficial trade agreement between China and the US.

The writer is former chief economist at the China Center for International Economic Exchanges.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Upping public sector investment a remedy for consumption slump

MAIN STREET

By Zhang Bin

Since the fourth quarter of last year, the overall perceptions of China's macroeconomy have changed. Seen from both data and market sentiment perspectives, overall market confidence and expectations have improved. However, concerns persist.

While there are some bright spots in the real economy, it has yet to fully emerge from the dilemma of insufficient demand. The economy is currently in a "climbing" phase. This ongoing phase is crucial — if policies can intensify and provide a push, it can fully escape the trap of insufficient demand, leading to smoother development in the future. But if the policy response is weak, the climb will be very difficult, and the economy may struggle to break through or take longer to recover from insufficient demand.

The Central Economic Work Conference and the Government Work Report from the two sessions have already outlined the proper direction. The next step is to further optimize policies in line with the latest macroeconomic changes in order to more rapidly escape the predicament of insufficient demand.

In a market economy, individual rational decisions can, in some cases, lead to irrational overall outcomes. For example, in an environment of insufficient

demand, a decline in household income leads to reduced consumption, falling corporate profits lead to reduced investment and a drop in government fiscal revenue leads to reduced spending. Taken individually, these are rational choices, but the outcome is that each economic agent ends up in a worse off situation — this is a typical market failure phenomenon.

Why emphasize this? Because market failure makes it difficult to rely on the market's own forces to self-correct and regain traction. Relying entirely on market-driven recovery inputs is costly and even unsustainable. We must depend on external forces to push the economy out of the trap of insufficient demand.

Insufficient demand is not merely a static issue but can lead to a negative spiral involving income, spending and credit, which deepens the economic predicament. It requires a force that exceeds market expectations — an external and stronger power — to break out of this cycle. So, where does this force come from?

Currently, we are placing great emphasis on stimulating consumption and have introduced a series of policies to promote it. These policies are helping to boost demand. However, at the same time, we cannot overlook the role of investment, especially the guiding role of public investment with its distinct exogenous nature. In fact, without the support of public investment, it would be difficult to truly escape the dilemma of insufficient demand.

First, consumption and investment are not in a "zero-sum" relationship. Historical data show that consumption and investment are

actually highly positively correlated. In other words, more investment leads to more consumption, while less investment leads to less consumption.

Both are positively correlated with GDP growth. The logic behind this is simple — more investment means more expenditure, which in turn creates more income, and increased income naturally supports higher consumption.

Second, investment is a "fast variable", while consumption is a "slow variable". Consumption involves the decision of millions of households, with each person consuming daily. But consumption adjustments are slow because they depend on long-term income changes. Consumption is an endogenous variable, making it difficult to rapidly boost buying appetites overnight.

On the other hand, investment, particularly public investment, is driven by the decisions of a few entities (such as the government), and it can be significantly adjusted in the short term. Investment is a "fast variable" and has a strong exogenous nature. In other words, the government can rapidly increase public investment, while consumption growth takes longer to materialize.

Third, relying solely on consumption will be insufficient to fill the demand gap. We have conducted some calculations, and to overcome insufficient demand and restore the CPI to around 2 percent for moderate inflation, GDP needs to fill a demand gap of 5 trillion yuan (\$687 billion) to 6 trillion yuan.

If we rely solely on consumption to fill this gap, consumption growth would need to exceed 15 percent.

Achieving such high consumption growth in the current environment would require a significant rise in household incomes, which is clearly unrealistic. Solely depending on consumption is far from sufficient. We must drive demand recovery through both "consumption + investment", particularly through public investment.

When discussing investment, some concerns arise. For example, investment already accounts for a high share of the economy, while consumption remains relatively low. Why should we continue to increase investment?

Additionally, some worry that China has already made significant investments in infrastructure, including railways, highways and airports, and manufacturing capacity is sufficient. Will continued investment lead to overcapacity and resource wastage? These concerns are valid but need clarification.

First, looking back at past experience, the periods of the most rapid consumption growth also coincided with the periods of the fastest investment growth, during which times consumption rates decreased. Only when the economy overcomes insufficient demand and the environment stabilizes will consumption rates organically rise.

From the perspective of manufacturing investment, China's share of manufacturing investment is indeed high compared to developed countries. In infrastructure areas such as railways, highways, airports and power grids, the investment scale in recent years has also been large. However, if we focus on public service investments, we find that

their share is significantly low. In countries like the United States, Germany, South Korea and France, the share of public service investment in total investment usually exceeds 17 percent while China's share is less than 5 percent. Regarding private service investments, China's share is also far below that of developed countries.

In terms of funding sources and debt sustainability for public investment, the core goal of public investment is to serve the public interest, so it should not be evaluated solely based on commercial returns or market profitability.

If a project does not generate profits, that does not justify withholding investment. Many infrastructure and public service projects' core value lies in improving social welfare rather than directly generating profits. Therefore, they should not be assessed with the same standards used for market investments.

Second, public investment needs to rely on government credit and adopt low-cost, long-term financing methods. In the past, many urban development projects relied on local governments' hidden debt financing, which is clearly unsustainable and risks leaving large fiscal burdens, high-interest costs and mismatched debt maturity issues. For future public investments, more emphasis should be placed on using low-cost, long-term government financing channels to reduce fiscal pressure.

Furthermore, financing methods should be tailored to the specific nature of the project. If a project benefits a broad population, it should be led by the central

government and financed through measures such as issuing national bonds. If the project mainly benefits a specific locality, the local government should bear the corresponding investment responsibility.

Additionally, if a project has certain commercial returns, such as some urban renewal projects, financing can be sourced through public-private partnerships, fiscal subsidies and support from policy-driven financial institutions, optimizing the funding structure and improving investment efficiency.

Lastly, we must address a core issue — the sustainability of government debt. Many worry that large-scale government borrowing for investment might worsen fiscal burdens. In fact, from the perspective of fiscal sustainability, government borrowing in the current economic environment would not introduce serious debt risks.

On the contrary, it could enhance fiscal stability. When the government increases investment, it can directly drive economic growth, increase tax revenue, boost land transfer income and support asset prices. As the economy recovers, various government revenues will increase, strengthening the overall capacity to service debt.

In the long term, the sustainability of government debt mainly depends on the comparison between debt growth and GDP growth. If the government's real interest rate is lower than the GDP growth rate, debt levels will decrease.

The writer is deputy director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of World Economics and Politics.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

COMMENT

Editorials

Neighborhood trip will help consolidate regional community with a shared future

Against the backdrop of rising global uncertainties, including aggressive unilateralism and protectionism, China's continuing advocacy for a shared future with neighboring countries demonstrates its unwavering support for multilateralism and economic globalization.

At a recent central conference on work related to neighborhood diplomacy, President Xi Jinping outlined China's approach to fostering ties with its neighbors based on the Asian values of peace, cooperation and openness. Emphasizing the principles of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusivity, he reiterated China's commitment to cultivating a community with a shared future among neighboring nations.

President Xi's state visits to three ASEAN nations from Monday to Friday highlights China's commitment to constructive engagement with neighboring countries and underscores the paramount importance China places on fostering strong ties with them. As Lin Jian, spokesperson for the Foreign Ministry, said, the visits to Vietnam, Malaysia and Cambodia, hold profound significance not just for the advancement of China's relations with the three nations themselves, but also with the broader Association of Southeast Asian Nations community.

Xi's milestone visit to Vietnam from Monday to Tuesday marks the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and Vietnam. It not only highlights the enduring friendship between the two nations but also presents a timely opportunity for the leaders of the two countries to deepen mutual trust and enhance bilateral cooperation across various domains.

Since 2004, China has been Vietnam's largest trading partner, a relationship that culminated in 2016 when Vietnam emerged as China's foremost trading partner within ASEAN. The bilateral trade volume between the two nations had surged to a historical high of over \$260 billion in 2024, and China has become Vietnam's first trading partner with whom its volume of trade has surpassed \$200 billion.

Both socialist nations, China and Vietnam are actively engaged in reform and opening-up initiatives tailored to their unique circumstances. Strengthening their relations serves the interests of both countries and their people, paving the way for increased collaboration and knowledge exchanges that will bolster their reform efforts.

President Xi's previous state visit to Vietnam in late 2023 laid the groundwork for a strategic partnership aimed at building a shared future between the two nations, heralding a new chapter in their bilateral relations. The heads-of-state dialogue has fostered a climate of trust and provided essential political guidance for multifaceted exchanges between the two countries, with China emerging as a primary source of tourism for Vietnam, underscoring the vast potential for diversified collaboration.

Xi's visits to Vietnam, Malaysia, the current chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and Cambodia, are indicative of the strong emphasis China puts on fostering positive relationships with its neighbors, a commitment that is reflected in tangible actions and collaborations to translate the principles of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit, and inclusiveness into meaningful cooperation.

It is acknowledged that disagreements between some of the ASEAN members and China do exist, and that addressing historical issues and immediate conflicting interests requires careful handling. But what is also acknowledged is the principle of harmony is essential for nurturing a cohesive and prosperous regional family. By steadfastly upholding the vision of a shared home, adhering to the objective of fostering a community with a shared future, and practicing equal-footed consultation alongside mutual understanding and accommodation, China and ASEAN are making the resolution of differences and the pursuit of mutually beneficial outcomes achievable goals.

But there are those from outside the region who wish to create discord rather than harmony. Through the formation of exclusive military and security alliances and the exploitation of the territorial disputes, their aim is to further complicate the geopolitical landscape in the region. These external interventions are intended to heighten tensions. It is imperative that all regional stakeholders prioritize the interests and aspirations of their people and pursue strategies that are cooperative, comprehensive and sustainable.

Upholding ASEAN's status as a zone of peace, freedom, and neutrality, respecting established regional agreements such as the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, and supporting an open and inclusive regional framework centered on ASEAN are crucial steps. As are strengthening mutual trust through dialogue and fostering security through collaboration.

Since President Xi initiated China's neighborhood diplomacy based on amity, sincerity, mutual benefit, and inclusiveness, collaborative efforts with neighboring nations have opened new avenues for neighborly relations and friendship, showcasing distinctively Asian approaches to harmonious coexistence. China remains committed to being ASEAN's steadfast and dependable long-term strategic partner. It will continue to work collaboratively with the ASEAN members to make Southeast Asia a beacon for the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.

United front right response to US injustice

While many are still betting on which side will blink first between China and the United States in their tit-for-tat tariff war, the answer is already there.

According to the latest guidance from US Customs on the weekend, smartphones and computers, along with some other goods, will not be affected by the Donald Trump administration's "reciprocal" tariff policy. This is a low-key step back. But it is the first signal of the administration's easing of tariffs under domestic pressure, particularly from those enterprises manufacturing in China for the US market, following Beijing raising its retaliatory tariffs to 125 percent on Friday after the US levies reached an absurd 145 percent.

That Beijing also announced on Friday that it would no longer respond to the US' future tariff increases is a cool-headed choice as anything above a 125 percent tariff is a political stunt.

While the slight blink from the US was generally unexpected. It is not without reason given the pushback from US enterprises and businesses. With the imposition of its "reciprocal" tariffs, it has been estimated that the retail price of the iPhone 16 Pro Max in the US, for instance, will surge from \$1,599 to \$2,300, and if Apple moves its plants producing its devices from China to the US, to avoid the tariff, the price might hit \$3,600 due to the higher cost of production in the US.

China's firm opposition to the tariff pressure being applied by the US administration lies not only in the confidence it has in its own advantages — its huge market and complete industry chains — but also, and more importantly, in the fact that this is a tariff war that has been imposed on China. In essence the aim of the US is not to construct a fair trade order but to extract economic gains by means of coercion and trade bullying.

China has remained and will continue to remain open to improving Sino-US relations and resolving disputes through dialogue and consultation, whether in the field of trade or technology or security. But when the US approach infringes on its core interests, such as its right to development, China has no choice but to stand up to defend its legitimate rights and interests.

As President Xi Jinping said during his meeting with visiting Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez in Beijing on Friday, China has achieved its development over the past 70-plus years through self-reliance and arduous struggle. It has never relied on the mercy of others, still less feared any unreasonable suppression. No matter how the external world changes, China will remain focused on doing its own affairs well.

More parties have acknowledged China's attitude toward the tariff war. In recent days, Minister of Commerce Wang Wentao has been communicating intensively with other parties on the trade war the US is waging. Last week, his list of video calls included those to his European Union, Malaysian, South African, Saudi Arabian and Brazilian counterparts, as well as the head of the World Trade Organization.

Notably, compared with his visit to China late last month, EU commerce chief Maros Sefcovic's talks with Wang last week proved to be more fruitful, showing that the EU has made new judgments and plans in light of the fast-changing situation over the past two weeks.

The two sides agreed to start consultations as soon as possible to discuss market access-related issues in depth; immediately launch negotiations on electric vehicle price commitments; and restart the China-EU trade remedy dialogue mechanism. Which are all important areas and issues that can activate the upgrading of China-EU economic and trade cooperation.

No wonder NYT columnist Thomas Friedman wrote in a recent article that the US leader had so "alienated our allies" that "many may never align with us against China in the same way".

Wang's talks with the other aforementioned parties have seemingly reinforced the fact the US' tariff blackmail gambit has gravely backfired.

WTO members are obliged to jointly defend an open and rules-based multilateral trading system and properly resolve differences through dialogue and cooperation under the WTO framework. Most members want to hold true to that rules-based system rather than accept the US administration's law of the jungle.

China is adjusting its sails to turn the headwind from the US into a tailwind by encouraging like-minded partners to advance free trade and a rules-based world order. China will therefore continue to rally those desiring to safeguard fairness and justice in international trade under the WTO system. More countries should stand with it to counter the bullying behavior of the US.

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Song Chen



Opinion Line

Japan betraying joint efforts to promote peace and stability

On Wednesday, during a meeting with Mark Rutte, secretary general of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba said, "A stronger NATO will benefit Japan greatly."

Signed in 1949 and most recently updated in 2023, the North Atlantic Treaty explicitly defines NATO as a regional defensive organization, as the treaty emphasizes that any invocation of collective self-defense must be "recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations", and that the alliance's mission is, by its own account, to "restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area". However, in recent years, especially now with Japan's coordination, it is clear that NATO's leadership has been pushing beyond its original geographic and legal mandate.

The joint statements and coordinated activities between Japan and NATO reflect a growing ambition to expand their influence into the Asia-Pacific under the banner of "shared values" and "technological cooperation". By prioritizing defense industrial ties and developing dual-use military technologies, NATO and Japan are helping to sow the seeds of military bloc formation in a region that has thrived as a cooperative environment. The Asia-Pacific does not need new Cold War-style confrontations, nor does

it benefit from imported geopolitical rivalries that threaten to undermine regional stability.

Japan's military trajectory, due to both historical legacy and present dynamics, has long been under international scrutiny. Japan's post-war Constitution has long imposed constraints on its military ambitions. Yet, over the past decade, Japan has increasingly sought to reinterpret or bypass these constraints. Its defense spending has risen continuously for more than a decade, culminating in a record-breaking 8.7 trillion yen (approximately \$55.1 billion) defense budget for the fiscal year starting from April, a 9.4 percent increase from the previous year.

Even more concerning is Japan's inflammatory stance on sensitive regional issues, such as the Taiwan question. The island is an inseparable part of China, and the Taiwan question is China's internal affair. It is not, and should never be, a matter for foreign governments or military alliances to interfere in. For Japan, which once invaded and colonized the Chinese island, to comment brazenly on the Taiwan question is historically tone-deaf.

The NATO-Japan statement's emphasis on maintaining "peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait" reflects either a profound misunderstanding or a willful misrepresentation of the issue. China's position could not be clearer, namely that it will realize reunification and this is unstoppable. It hopes to do so peacefully, but it is precisely the external interferences, including Japan's repeated provocations, that undermine peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. For Japan and NATO to position themselves as "protectors" of regional peace while simultaneously engaging in actions that escalate tensions is a stark contradiction.

This year marks the 80th anniversary of the victory in the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45) and World War II. It is a solemn reminder of the devastating consequences of militarism and expansionism. For Japan, this milestone should serve as an opportunity to reflect on its historical responsibilities, recommit to peaceful development, and play a constructive role in fostering Asia-Pacific cooperation. For its Western allies, particularly those spearheading NATO's eastward expansion, it is equally vital to remember who once launched a global war and who now seeks to challenge the post-war order.

Spearheading NATO's drift into the Asia-Pacific will not do Japan any good — it is time Japan realized that.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG,
CHINA DAILY

What They Say

DPP's economic gambit an ill-fated gamble

After hearing a report on the impacts of the United States' tariffs on Taiwan last week, the island's Democratic Progressive Party authorities leader Lai Ching-te suggested the island should "depart from the Chinese economy for the Global North".

With this whimsical idea, the secessionist-minded DPP leader actually wanted to indicate Taiwan should rely more on the United States so it can decouple its economy from that of the Chinese mainland. Something that accords with his long-term aim of "desinicizing" the island's economy by building "non-red" supply chains with the US.

So the "Global North" here, as some Taiwan observers pointed out, is only a "fig leaf" exposing Lai's embarrassment at the fact the US has not extended any special treatment to the island in the universal trade war it has launched.

The idea actually originates from Lai's old tune of relying on the US to resist the Chinese mainland. But the 32 percent tariff hikes the US administration threatened to impose on the island severely slapped the DPP leader in the face.

Despite the US administration's 90-day suspension of its additional tariffs against multiple economies, including

Taiwan, the island is still subject to an additional 10 percent tariff from the US.

The Lai authorities have announced plans to provide assistance of NT\$88 billion (\$2.72 billion), which, based on Taiwan's exports of goods to the US of more than \$110 billion last year, will not help the island's exporters offset the damages inflicted by the US' tariffs, which could hit \$37 billion in total, according to the estimates of some analysts.

The US' tariff war presented the island with an opportunity to reset its cross-strait economic and trade cooperation that has been unavoidably affected by the DPP authorities' "pro-independence" policy since they took power in 2016.

The island's residents can see clearly that the US is unreliable as either a security partner or a trading partner. While the mainland has consistently shown that it not only cares about the island's peace and prosperity, but it is also the "anchor of stability" in an uncertain world by offering a fair and predictable business environment.

It can be seen that the mainland, a market accounting for about 40 percent of the island's exports compared

with the US' 15 percent, has long been the largest source of Taiwan's trade surplus and the largest stabilizer for Taiwan to maintain trade balance.

Despite the DPP authorities' suppression, the cross-strait trade volume reached \$292.97 billion last year, a year-on-year increase of 9.4 percent thanks to the mainland's pro-trade and pro-cooperation efforts. In the first two months, the cross-strait trade ushered in a good start to the year, with an amount of \$43.18 billion, a year-on-year increase of 8.8 percent in spite of the strong headwinds blown by the US.

Japan has seen China replace the US as its largest trading partner since 2022. China has been the largest export market for the Republic of Korea for many years. And a similar trend, which will only be strengthened by the US' tariff war, is also observed with some major European economies.

The Lai authorities' de facto push to try and "depart from the mainland economy for the Global North" not only violates market law, as the island's exports to the US and the mainland vary structurally, but also goes against the actual trend of the Global North. It is doomed to failure.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | China-Indonesia Relations

Editor's note: This year marks the 75th anniversary of the establishment of China-Indonesia diplomatic relations. Taking the anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations as an opportunity, the two countries should strengthen cooperation on multilateral affairs and practice multilateralism. Three experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Fajar Hirawan

Beijing-Jakarta partnership beyond trade

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Indonesia, which forged a partnership that has grown robustly over the decades. Central to this relationship is economic cooperation, particularly under the Belt and Road Initiative framework, which has substantially boosted bilateral trade and infrastructure development.

China has firmly established itself as Indonesia's largest trading partner. In 2022, bilateral trade reached about \$133.64 billion, accounting for 25 percent of Indonesia's total trade, underscoring China's pivotal role in Indonesia's economic landscape. There was a slight decline of 4.4 percent in 2023, with trade totaling \$127.82 billion, but in 2024, trade rebounded to \$135.17 billion. The overall trend indicates deepening economic interdependence between the two countries.

Indonesia's exports to China mostly consist of resource-based commodities such as nickel-iron, thermal coal and liquefied petroleum gas, reflecting Indonesia's rich natural resource base and China's significant demand for raw materials. On the other hand, China exports high-value products such as machinery, electronics, and iron and steel products to Indonesia, meeting Indonesia's growing industrial and consumer needs. This complementary trade structure has facilitated balanced economic exchanges beneficial to both sides.

Infrastructure development remains a cornerstone of China-Indonesia economic cooperation under the Belt and Road framework. The Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway stands as a flagship project in Southeast Asia. Inaugurated in October 2023, this 142.3-kilometer-long railway has reduced travel time between Jakarta and Bandung from more than three hours to about 40 minutes, reshaping inter-city connectivity and facilitating economic mobility. The project, executed by PT Kereta Cepat Indonesia-China, a joint venture between Indonesian state-owned enterprises and China Railway International, illustrates the significant benefits derived from international cooperation in large-scale infrastructure projects.

The successful completion of the Jakarta-Bandung HSR has spurred discussions on extending the high-speed rail network to Surabaya, which will improve connectivity across Java, Indonesia's most populous and eco-

nomic dynamic island. The proposed extension will reduce travel time between Jakarta and Surabaya from the current 8-13 hours to about 3.5 hours, promising substantial economic stimulation along this vital corridor.

Indonesia's rich nickel reserves have attracted significant Chinese investment, directly aligning with China's strategic initiative to secure essential minerals for its growing industries, especially in electric vehicles and batteries. A notable example of this cooperation is Indonesia Morowali Industrial Park in Central Sulawesi. Developed with extensive Chinese investment, IMIP has turned the region into a significant nickel processing hub, positioning Indonesia as a leading global nickel producer. This project has increased Indonesia's export revenue, created jobs and facilitated valuable technology transfers.



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helping Jakarta realize its renewable energy goals.

Their collaboration in the financial sector is also expanding, led by the

central banks of the two countries — the People's Bank of China and Bank Indonesia. The Indonesian central bank plays a pivotal role in enhancing bilateral financial cooperation through initiatives aimed at facilitating cross-border payments and settlements, promoting local currency transactions, and advancing financial technology and digital currencies.

This partnership holds special promise in the "two countries, twin parks" framework, providing a structured approach to simplify and secure cross-border financial flows. Further collaboration under the Digital Silk Road initiative is also expected to significantly boost payment system interoperability, digital financial inclusion, and technological innovation, strengthening the broader economic integration of the two sides.

Despite its many achievements, the China-Indonesia partnership faces some challenges. Certain projects should address people's concerns about environmental impacts and labor conditions, especially in nickel mining and processing. The challenges call for sustainable and socially responsible investment to mitigate the negative environmental impact and foster long-term stability and prosperity.

Geopolitically, Indonesia must continue to cautiously navigate complex international relations, balancing its strategic interests amid global competition between major powers. Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto's visits to China and the United States shortly after his inauguration in 2024 showed Indonesia's intention to maintain balanced global engagement between the two global powers, while safeguarding its strategic autonomy.

The China-Indonesia partnership is set to deepen further, driven by mutual interest, in emerging sectors such as the digital economy, healthcare and education. Regular dialogue, high-level diplomatic exchanges, and the sustained commitment of both sides reflect their determination to jointly address future challenges and capitalize on opportunities.

As China and Indonesia commemorate 75 years of diplomatic relations, their cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative symbolizes a dynamic, evolving and resilient partnership.

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MAXUEJING / CHINA DAILY

Mohammad Faisal

Indonesia, China's economies complementary

Relations between Indonesia and China have historically been very dynamic, not only from the political and socio-cultural point of view but also from the economic perspective. The increasingly close economic ties between the two sides, particularly over the past two decades, have attracted considerable attention from scholars as well as ordinary people.

China has been Indonesia's most important trading partner for more than a decade and a major source of foreign investment, while Chinese tourists constitute one of the largest groups of visitors to Indonesia. China has also been the largest source of imports for Indonesia since 2010, and the largest export destination since 2016. In 2024, Sino-Indonesian trade reached over \$135 billion.

Chinese investment, too, has seen a dramatic increase, from \$173.6 million in 2010 to \$7.4 billion in 2023, making the Asian giant the second-largest foreign investor in Indonesia, after Singapore.

Chinese investment in Indonesia began increasing following the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative. Chinese funding for the Belt and Road projects in Indonesia began in 2015, mostly in infrastructure including the development and expansion of seaports and dams. Subsequent investments, especially in the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway, have resulted in landmark projects.

Launched in 2023, Whoosh, the name of the high-speed train, became the first of its kind in Southeast Asia

and is expected to improve connectivity and economic growth in the region. Since becoming operational, it has ferried nearly 8 million passengers.

Apart from infrastructure projects, Chinese investments have also played a pivotal role in the nickel processing industry in Indonesia. Supported by the ban on nickel ore exports, Chinese investments in nickel smelters, particularly in the nickel-rich regions of eastern Indonesia such as Sulawesi and Maluku, have intensified in the last decade.

These investments have contributed to the increase in Indonesia's exports of manufactured goods, especially of nickel-based products. The value of Indonesia's ferro alloy exports to China, for example, jumped from \$185 million in 2015 to \$4.5 billion in 2020. In fact, in 2020, nearly 96 percent of Indonesia's ferro nickel exports were destined for China.

Besides, Indonesia is trying to boost its nickel-based downstream industrial development, particularly in the electric vehicles (EV) sector. Since 2022, the Indonesian government has been providing various fiscal and non-fiscal incentives to not only promote the sales of EVs but also attract investments in EV manufacturing, including EV batteries. China has become the major beneficiary of these incentives, as indicated by the fast-growing sales of Chinese-made EV brands manufac-



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tured by companies such as BYD and Wuling in Indonesia in the last couple of years.

In addition, both countries have deepened cooperation in industrial parks, solar photovoltaic panels and the digital economy, as well as artificial intelligence research and development.

In international forums, Indonesia and China have worked together under various multilateral cooperation frameworks, including Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, the G20, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, and BRICS.

People-to-people exchanges between the two countries have also become increasingly important. In 2024, nearly 8.6 percent of the 13.9 million international tourists visiting Indonesia were Chinese, making China the fourth-largest source of foreign tourists for the country, after Malaysia, Australia and Singapore.

Given their closer economic ties, and increasing influence in global and regional affairs, the two countries are likely to strengthen their strategic engagement and economic collaboration. Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto's visit to Beijing, shortly after his inauguration, reflects his intent to sustain the country's relationship with China.

However, the two sides still need to improve a number of areas and engage in more beneficial collaboration. There is need for increasing

Jia Duqiang

China-ASEAN cooperation rising to higher level

As ASEAN's largest member state in terms of territory, population and economy, and a key member of G20, Indonesia has been playing a key role in advancing China-ASEAN cooperation and ASEAN integration.

Indonesia has been helping strengthen China-ASEAN relations, supporting the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative and fostering a China-ASEAN community with a shared future. Since 2013, the two countries have aligned their national strategies — Chinese modernization with Indonesia's Golden Indonesia 2045 Vision — achieving high-level cooperation in trade, infrastructure and investment.

The Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway, a flagship Belt and Road project, has become a benchmark for regional connectivity. The depth of Sino-Indonesian relations can be gauged from the fact that Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto chose China as his first foreign destination after taking office in November 2024. During his visit to China, the two sides agreed to elevate their comprehensive strategic partnership.

Sino-Indonesian economic and trade cooperation has continued to deepen at a sustained pace. And thanks to the close coordination between Indonesia and China as well as the joint efforts of the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, China-ASEAN cooperation, too, has deepened; in fact it has been facilitating high-quality and high-level development.

The combined economic output of China and ASEAN is more than one-fifth of the global total. In terms of population, while China's is over 1.4 billion, ASEAN's is nearly 700 million. Also, the combined GDP of ASEAN members was \$3.8 trillion in 2023, making it the world's fifth-largest economy. No wonder its market influence and economic impact are growing steadily.

China and ASEAN have economic complementary, with their trade and economic cooperation reflecting robust vitality. Since 2013, China-ASEAN trade has grown on average 7.5 percent a year, reaching \$982.34 billion in 2024. While China has remained ASEAN's largest trading partner for 16 consecutive years, ASEAN has been China's top trading partner for the past five years, with Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia being China's top three trading partners within ASEAN.

China and ASEAN have deepened cooperation not only in traditional fields such as agriculture, minerals, infrastructure including transportation, finance and investment, but also extended it to emerging areas like the digital economy and the green economy, with special focus on advancing new quality productive forces and promoting high-quality development.

According to China's customs data, in 2023, ASEAN was China's second-largest source of agricultural imports, accounting for 15.6 percent of the country's total agricultural import value, and China was ASEAN's second-largest source of foreign investment, with the scale of investment continuing to grow. Ministry of Commerce data show that in 2024, China's non-financial outward direct investment was \$143.85 billion, with investment in ASEAN increasing by 12.6 percent year-on-year.

The two sides approved the "Action Plan on Implementing ASEAN-China Partnership on Digital Economy Cooperation" in 2022, with China extending strong support to the "ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025" and the "ASEAN Digital Community 2045". Besides, China has signed memorandums of understanding with different ASEAN members on investment in the digital economy and green development. In particular, ASEAN has become a key overseas investment destination for Chinese electric vehicle enterprises.

The continuous improvement of China-ASEAN cooperation mechanisms has helped institutionalize their collaboration. Regional cooperation mechanisms, such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, the Belt and Road Initiative, the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area 3.0 and BRICS, have become increasingly refined and mature. Since the RCEP took effect on Jan 1, 2022, it has been playing a vital role in promoting trade and investment among the member economies, strengthening industry chains and advancing regional integration. In 2024, during its tenure as the non-ASEAN rotating chair of the RCEP, China, along with Indonesia, the ASEAN chair, helped establish the "RCEP Support Unit".

China has always regarded ASEAN as a priority in its neighborhood diplomacy and a key region in its vision to build a regional community with a shared future. The two sides have maintained high-level strategic cooperation, adhering to the fundamental norms of international relations, including the principles of the United Nations Charter, the ASEAN Charter, the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. And both are committed to safeguarding regional peace and security, and achieving win-win cooperation and shared development while deepening mutual political trust.

Since 2013, when China proposed to help build a closer China-ASEAN community with a shared future, the initiative has made remarkable progress.

China-ASEAN cooperation has emerged as a robust engine driving economic development in the Asia-Pacific region, and has become one of the most dynamic and successful models of regional cooperation. By working together, China and ASEAN have not only strengthened regional stability and promoted common prosperity but also sent a positive signal of cooperation to the world, which faces rising unilateralism and trade protectionism. Their partnership contributes significantly to global peace, stability and economic recovery.

The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



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GLOBAL VIEWS

AGUS HARIMURTI YUDHOYONO

Asia's path in a transforming world

A more integrated Asia benefits everyone, ensuring collective resilience in an era of uncertainty

Eighty years ago, Asia was recovering from wars, colonial legacies and economic challenges. Today, it is the world's economic engine, contributing more than half of global growth. But will this success lead to greater cooperation, or will fragmentation define the region's rise? The answer lies in the choices we make today. The



Boao Forum for Asia 2025 presented an opportunity to shape those decisions, urging sustainable and inclusive growth.

Indonesia has long played a role in the Boao Forum. In 2005, then-president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono addressed the forum under the theme "Asia Searching for Win-Win: The New Role for Asia". That year marked the establishment of the strategic partnership between Indonesia and China, setting the stage for future collaboration.

Today, the global landscape is shifting rapidly, with economic realignments, technological breakthroughs, geopolitical tensions, and climate change impacts. Now is the time to think bigger, act faster, and collaborate more deeply.

Sustainability is more than crisis management; it's about lifting communities out of poverty, safeguarding natural resources, and ensuring long-term prosperity. Resilience may not yield immediate returns, but it lays the foundation for stability.

Under President Prabowo Subianto, Indonesia is integrating infrastructure, food security, water management and energy sustainability into a unified strategy. These areas are interconnected. No infrastructure is valuable without electricity, clean water or agricultural productivity. Indonesia's initiatives, such as improving irrigation systems and scaling renewable energy, contribute to a resilient economy. In Central Java, improved irrigation has boosted agricultural yields, reducing climate risks.

No country can tackle sustainable development alone. Climate risk, energy security and food resilience are global challenges that require cooperation. True sustainability can only be achieved through joint action.

Trust, shared responsibility, and inclusive growth must underpin Asia's development agenda.

Three areas stand out: infrastructure connectivity, the clean energy transition and digital transformation.

Infrastructure connectivity is crucial for trade and investment. Without efficient roads, ports and digital networks, economic growth stagnates. Indonesia advocates for deeper cooperation on cross-border infrastructure to ensure widespread benefits. The Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025 offers a framework, while countries such as Vietnam and Thailand highlight how public-private partnerships can accelerate development.

Building on this regional commitment, Indonesia actively fosters partnerships with key international players to enhance its infrastructure network. A notable example is the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway, also known as Whoosh, developed in collaboration with China as part of Indonesia's broader infrastructure strategy. Beyond enhancing connectivity, the project stimulates economic growth along its corridor, generating new opportunities for businesses and local communities.

Regional cooperation is vital for the clean energy transition. Moving away from fossil fuels presents challenges for emerging economies, but reliance on outdated energy sources is unsustainable. The Asian Development Bank estimates that unchecked climate change could shrink regional GDP by up to 17 percent by 2070. On the other hand, investment in green infrastructure and clean energy could unlock billions of dollars in economic gains and create thousands of jobs. Indonesia, with the world's largest geothermal reserves, is making renewable energy a central part of its strategy.

Indonesia's energy transition extends beyond geothermal

development to the strategic expansion of its battery and electric vehicles ecosystem. A key priority is advancing its nickel downstream industry to maximize domestic value creation and strengthen global competitiveness. To support this vision, Indonesia has engaged international partners, with investment from China playing a significant role in accelerating development. By leveraging its resources, fostering innovation, and driving industrial growth, Indonesia is positioning itself as a major player in the global battery and EV supply chain.

Digital governance must also be addressed. Artificial intelligence, data and automation are reshaping industries, offering potential to enhance energy efficiency, healthcare and education. But without regulation, these technologies could widen inequalities and create security risks. Indonesia supports the establishment of a global framework for AI governance to ensure technology benefits society while reducing digital divides. Clear regulations and ethical standards are necessary for inclusive growth.

As global dynamics change, Asia stands at a critical juncture. Will it become a battleground for rivalries, or will it rise as a unified force for stability and progress? Traditional security frameworks that focus on military strength and economic power are no longer sufficient. Long-term resilience now depends on food, water and energy security, as well as defense and diplomacy.

For decades, the Association of the Southeast Asian Nations has anchored regional stability, guided by the belief that regional challenges require regional solutions. Strengthening ASEAN institutions, advancing security dialogues, and reinforcing multilateral partnerships are key to lasting peace and economic resilience. A connected Asia is not only an engine of growth but also a pillar of geopolitical stability. Through cooperation with diverse partners, including China as a comprehensive strategic partner, ASEAN plays a vital role in promoting inclusive and sustainable growth, ensuring that the benefits are widely shared across the region.

Regional cooperation faces challenges such as diverging national interests and economic disparities. But the cost of fragmentation is much higher. A more integrated Asia benefits everyone, ensuring collective resilience in an era of uncertainty.

Sustainable development is no longer just an economic priority; it is a security imperative. Trust, shared responsibility, and inclusive growth must underpin Asia's development agenda. Decisions made today will determine whether the region emerges as a model of unity and innovation or succumbs to division and short-termism.

The future is not something to wait for; it is something we build together. Governments must commit to bold reforms, businesses must drive sustainable innovation, and regional partnerships must move from rhetoric to results. Only then will Asia's rise be defined by collaboration rather than fragmentation.

As the Javanese say, *Becik kettik, olo ketoro*; good deeds will be seen, and bad deeds will not stay hidden forever. The choices we make will define the world our children inherit.

The author is coordinating minister for the Infrastructure and Regional Development, Indonesia. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY



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IVAN CARDILLO

Cooperation over confrontation

Trust, stability and mutual benefit should form the cornerstone of EU-China economic relations

President Donald Trump's return to the White House has brought Europe and China to a crossroads in their economic relationship. US protectionism — marked by sweeping tariffs and an "America First" agenda — is disruptive for global trade. With



global supply chains facing greater uncertainty and economic growth fragile, the stakes for EU-China trade relations are high. This moment calls for laying emphasis on cooperation, joint ventures and stable frameworks over the inefficiency and long-term damage of tariffs and unilateral economic measures.

Unilateral economic measures erode trust and predictability — the very foundations of stable commerce.

In late 2024 and early 2025, trade tensions between the European Union and China escalated into a cycle of reciprocal tariffs. The EU imposed steep anti-subsidy duties — ranging from 17 percent to 35.3 percent — on Chinese electric vehicles, prompting Beijing to retaliate with anti-dumping duties on European brandy and investigations into EU agricultural exports. The conflict quickly expanded beyond EVs, with the EU targeting additional Chinese goods such as biodiesel, erythritol and titanium dioxide. In turn, China extended countermeasures affecting key European sectors, including pork and dairy.

However, trade imbalances cannot be addressed by imposing tariffs. They stem from deeper structural factors — such as comparative advantages, consumption dynamics, and supply chain specialization — that require targeted domestic reforms and international cooperation.

Rather than "winning" a better deal, punitive measures often lead to a breakdown of dialogue.

EU-China economic cooperation has immense potential when guided by stable agreements and mutual openness. Countless European companies operating in China report strong returns on investment, and Chinese enterprises expanding into Europe create local jobs and bring in needed capital. In 2024, against the headwind of global uncertainties, foreign investors continued to view China as a prime destination: establishing more than 59,000 new foreign-invested companies, a 9.9-percent increase year-on-year. Notably, the average return on foreign direct investment in China has been about 9 percent in recent years, among the highest in the world. These profits often flow back

to European parent companies, supporting jobs and innovation at home. European businesses from automotive to luxury goods have thrived by partnering with China. The long-term benefits of engagement far outweigh the short-term gains some seek through protectionism.

The breakdown of reciprocity mechanisms between the EU and China in recent years has fed skepticism in both Brussels and Beijing. European stakeholders have long raised concerns about unequal market access — pointing out that Chinese companies often enjoy open access to EU markets, while European companies face restrictions in China. These concerns prompted the EU to insist on "reciprocity" and a "level playing field". Indeed, the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment negotiations were driven by a desire to lock in commitments on fair market access and investment protection. When the CAI was agreed in principle in late 2020, it was hailed as a breakthrough to address these issues. However, in 2021, mutual sanctions — initially sparked by human rights disputes — led the European Parliament to freeze ratification of the CAI, effectively shelving seven years of negotiators' work. This collapse demonstrated how political rifts can derail economic diplomacy. Both sides walked away with grievances: the EU felt China had violated norms by sanctioning elected officials, and China felt the EU was acting in bad faith under external (US) influence.

Rebuilding trust is paramount, and it is achievable through consistent, confidence-building measures.

First, both sides must improve communication and transparency. Misunderstandings often breed suspicion. For instance, European regulators worry about China's industrial policies and subsidies, while Chinese officials bristle at Europe's talk of "de-risking" as a cover for protectionism. Regular, frank dialogue can clarify intentions. The revival of high-level economic dialogue, as well as working groups on specific concerns, will help each side understand the other's red lines and find compromise solutions. Preventive diplomacy — solving irritants before they escalate — should be the mantra.

Second, Europe and China need to recognize their shared interest in a balanced geopolitical-economic order. Neither benefits from a bifurcated global economy or a new Cold War. The EU often describes China as partner, competitor, and rival simultaneously. Strategic competition will not disappear, but it need not preclude deep partnership in other arenas. In fact, maintaining engagement with China is part of

Europe's strategy for strategic autonomy — ensuring it is not overly dependent on any one power, including the United States. Europe must prepare to withstand US pressure by articulating its own interests clearly. A balanced approach — where the EU coordinates with the US on legitimate concerns but also defends its right to dialogue and trade with China — will serve Europe best.

Finally, trust will grow when concrete positive results start flowing. Nothing builds confidence like success. If, for example, the EU and China manage to agree on a sectoral deal — say, a green tech partnership that eliminates tariffs on environmental goods and sets joint investment funds for clean energy projects — both sides will see proof that cooperation works, inspiring further collaboration. If China's recently announced 2025 Action Plan for Stabilizing Foreign Investment is implemented well and European companies visibly benefit, it will reassure EU investors that China is serious about openness. For its part, the EU can demonstrate goodwill by advancing investment agreement talks or reconsidering certain export control measures that most concern Beijing, in exchange for Chinese reciprocity. Step by step, such actions will rebuild a reservoir of trust that insulates the economic relationship from the vagaries of politics.

Trust, stability, and mutual benefit should form the cornerstone of EU-China economic relations as the world enters a period of uncertain geopolitics.

Furthermore, mixing commercial matters with security concerns is a grave strategic misstep. Trade should not become collateral damage in the pursuit of geopolitical positioning. The goal must not be to extract a short-term "deal" under the pressure of fleeting circumstances, but to build a resilient, forward-looking partnership rooted in mutual respect and shared prosperity. As Europe and China navigate an era of global uncertainty, their relationship must be guided not by reactionary impulses, but by the long-term vision of sustainable cooperation.

The success of EU-China trade relations will set a precedent for how open, rules-based cooperation can survive in an increasingly fragmented world.

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LIFE



A leather-carved necklace designed by Li Xiaofang.



Left: A leather-carved choker. Above: A horse pattern necklace.

How much impact can a single elective course have? For Li Xiaofang, one made a great impact on her entire career.

Born in 1994 in Tongliao, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, Li was a junior studying art design at Inner Mongolia University when she enrolled in a class on traditional ethnic Mongolian leather carving, a national intangible cultural heritage, a decision that changed her life. After graduating, she founded her studio and devoted herself to the craft ever since.

Today, her studio Sange Xiangpijiang (Three Fragrant Leather Artisans) is nestled on Saishang Old Street in Hohhot and has become a must-visit tourist destination. This year, she launched her own brand Najjili, which means "a gift from a friend" in Mongolian.

"I hope what people take home is a gift from a friend," she says.

Blending tradition with modern appeal, Li is infusing leather carving with elements of Chinese culture and contemporary design. From bamboo-inspired necklaces to handbags that combine handweaving with intricate carvings, such as playful cats and dogs, she continues to explore new possibilities for the ancient craft, one piece at a time.

Down to the details

Growing up, Li had little exposure to leather carving, despite her ethnic Mongolian heritage. It wasn't until college that she discovered the craft. In class, she was struck by the intricate beauty of leather art.

Leather carving is an intricate process that requires dozens of steps from selecting leather and sketching patterns to carving, hammering, and coloring. Each detail contributes to the raised, textured designs that define the craft.

With a background in fine arts, Li started from scratch, mastering each technique step by step. After the semester ended, she continued refining her skills in her spare time. What began as small projects like wallets and belts quickly gained traction as friends and acquaintances took notice. Orders soon followed.

Encouraged by the demand, Li took a leap of faith. After graduating in 2016, she and a classmate who is now her husband, opened a leather carving studio in Hohhot.

Beyond traditional leather paintings, wallets and belts, she expanded her product line to include keychains, handbags, decorative pieces, and even leather car accessories.

Among her bestsellers are saddle-shaped ornaments, prized for their distinct designs, vibrant colors and deep cultural significance.

"Auspicious cloud patterns are very popular," Li says. "Young people appreciate traditional elements but the designs need to be simple and refined. Compared to large leather paintings, smaller decorative pieces resonate more because they capture

Carving a hidden gem of heritage

Craftswoman devotes herself to ethnic Mongolian art, launching her own brand to give 'gifts from a friend', Li Yingxue reports.



Li Xiaofang (center) works on leather carving in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia autonomous region. Her works include (clockwise from top left): a leather-carved painting with a bull head pattern; a leather-carved painting titled *Auspicious Grassland*; a saddle-shaped bag; and a notebook with leather-carved cover. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

the essence of our culture and make meaningful gifts."

On social media, many users have called Li's shop a "hidden gem" for visitors to Hohhot, drawing in curious tourists eager to explore her handcrafted leather goods.

Xiaohongshu user "Hongdouxiaoxier" bought a leather belt for her father and was impressed by the shop's cultural and creative products. "For anyone visiting Hohhot, I highly recommend this place! It's unique and affordable, and they

make perfect souvenirs. Who wouldn't love it?" she wrote.

To create a welcoming experience, Li placed a sign outside her shop that reads, "Thinking of You in Hohhot", which became a popular tourist photo spot. Inside, visitors can also collect custom stamps. "So many people love the sign. I'm even thinking of charging for photos," Li says, jokingly.

Among those drawn to the studio is 29-year-old Narisu who joined in 2017 after graduating from universi-

ty. Like Li, he started from scratch and is now a skilled leather carver.

"I just wanted to try it at first but fell in love with the craft," he says. "Not many young people are doing this anymore and I want to keep it going."

Beyond traditional carving, he experiments with new materials and techniques to create fresh designs. His routine is simple — carving in the morning with headphones on and working until the piece is done. If needed, he continues at home.

Li, on the other hand, juggles carving with running the business. "She's the glue that holds everything together," Narisu says.

Despite her busy schedule, Li still spends much of her time on leather carving, a craft she deeply enjoys. One of the most challenging steps, she says, is "walking the blade" — using a special knife to carve patterns onto cowhide. This step determines the final look of the piece and requires a steady hand and focus.

"I love this process; it helps me

focus completely," Li says.

Her dedication has earned recognition. In 2019, her leather-carved instrument case "Zhaojun departs beyond the Great Wall" won first prize in the product design category at a national vocational art and design competition. She has also received multiple awards in cultural tourism and ethnic handicraft contests.

Beyond selling her work, Li sees the competitions as a way to further her skills. "They give me a chance to improve and connect with other heritage artisans," she says.

Empowering others

As Li's leather carving studio grew, she made it a priority to help others, particularly people with disabilities. "Finding work is already challenging for them but here, they can learn a skill that might support them in the future," she says.

A mother of a 7-year-old, Li understands the struggles of balancing work and family. To support full-time mothers, she teaches some of them how to color leather carvings and gives them small orders they can complete at home. "Some take materials home, others come to the shop. It's not just about the income to them, it's about having a sense of purpose," she says.

In 2019, Li pursued a master's degree at the Mongolian State University of Education in Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia, where she honed her skills and gained inspiration from traditional leather carving techniques and patterns.

In 2022, she joined Embroidering for the Future, a public welfare program by the YouChange China Social Entrepreneur Foundation and The Beijing Starbucks Foundation. In two weeks of training in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, she gained insights into product design, an area she had never formally studied. "The lectures and case studies helped me understand how to approach new designs in a structured way. It was incredibly useful," she says.

The program also introduced her to other intangible cultural heritage inheritors, broadening her perspective on traditional crafts. With the help of the program's mentors, she launched her brand which features a logo inspired by a saddle and Mongolian motifs.

Today, Li's studio spans 180 square meters, with a retail space downstairs and a workshop upstairs. With the growing demand, she hopes to expand to a larger space where she can grow her brand and offer training and hands-on experiences to those interested in leather carving.

"Hohhot now attracts tourists year-round. Last year, we even ran out of stock for some products," she says. "If we can expand our team, we plan to sell online so more people can experience leather carving."

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From left: Other pieces by Li are: a quiver-shaped bag designed by Li; a leather-carved painting with a Wind Horse pattern, an ethnic Mongolian cultural symbol; a leather-carved painting combining traditional ethnic Mongolian totems with Suzhou-style window lattice designs; and a leather-carved painting featuring a bull head pattern.



Left: At the exhibition *Rejoicing in Woods and Springs*, visitors observe a Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) painting depicting Emperor Qianlong enjoying leisure time by a lotus pond, with a portrait of Claude Monet in the background. **Right:** A highlight of the exhibition is an art installation inspired by the opera stage in Juanqin Zhai, a key structure in the Qianlong Garden. PHOTOS BY JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY



In 1772, Emperor Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), then just turning 60, had reason to be joyful after finally securing his dream place for retirement in the Forbidden City, the royal palace in the heart of Beijing.

Known as Qianlong Garden, the site in the Ningshou Gong ("palace of tranquility and longevity") compound was designed in a breathtakingly exquisite way.

Pavilions, corridors, rockeries, a belvedere, a teahouse, a Buddhist hall and more subtle settings provided a retreat amid mountains and forests within the merely 6,000-square-meter space, all with a touch of splendor.

Nevertheless, the emperor had little time to appreciate his surroundings as he gave the throne to his son when he was 85. He merely enjoyed three years of "retirement" before he died.

We may hardly know whether Qianlong had enough time to fully savor the retreat from everyday cacophony, but the garden has left us a poetic legacy: a coming together of aesthetics and nature. This is undoubtedly an inspiration for visitors to a new exhibition in the Forbidden City, now known as the Palace Museum.

For the occasion, *Rejoicing in Woods and Springs: A Journey through Garden Cultures in China and the Wider World*, which will run through to June 29, more than 200 exhibits from home and abroad, including landscape paintings, sculptures, furniture and indoor decorations, are on show at the Meridian Gate Galleries.

In this exhibition, visitors can appreciate various artworks related to gardens, not only those famous throughout Chinese history that reveal Zen and literati's refined taste, but also different styles across the world, including the villa garden of Pompeii in Italy, medieval monastery gardens, the Palace of Versailles in France and gardens from the Edo period in Japan.

Qianlong Garden is where to start the journey.

"It almost encompasses all the aesthetic interests of ancient Chinese garden-making," says Li Yue, the chief researcher on the Qianlong Garden project from the Palace Museum's department of architectural heritage.

"As we review the Qianlong Garden, it is not merely out of curiosity about an emperor's aesthetic taste, but also because it provides us with a thought-provoking perspective that is still inspiring: Is there another, more delicate, more serene, and more poetic way for humans to interact with nature and space?"

Resonance in space

The wooden gate carved with lotus patterns from the Building of Luminous Clouds (Yunguang Lou), the Buddhist hall in the Qianlong Garden, is a highlighted setting in the exhibition.

Through the gate, visitors may peep into a group of wooden screens depicting Buddhist deities, also from that hall, and nurture a contemplative moment like the retired emperor.

A pair of jade censers further create an atmosphere of tranquility. They are from the Hall of Imperial Peace (Qin'an Dian), a Taoist temple in the Imperial Garden in the north of Forbidden City.

Cloisters in a Nunnery, a German watercolor on loan from The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York,

Garden exhibition shows seeds of culture

Forbidden City event looks at how a small plot of land can inspire and nurture human creativity, **Wang Kaihao** reports.

will also catch the eye. The artist, Simon Quaglio, used light and shadow to highlight the elegant arches and exquisite columns within the garden of nunnery that also represents the strength of belief.

"When we designed this exhibition to put Chinese and overseas gardens together, it would be too abstract if we just display their typical elements and thus theoretically analyze their respective features," explains Zhu Yufan, a professor at Tsinghua University and a co-curator of the exhibition.

"Everybody would have certain activities in the gardens," he says.

"It would be easier for visitors to feel emotionally connected if we tell them what happen in the gardens and thus reflect the garden owners' thinking."

Recreation, antique collection, mental cultivation, celebrities gathering and other activities in the garden thus compose different themes of the exhibition.

Chemistry may naturally be created in this arrangement.

Walking along the zigzag lane in the gallery, which mimics the shape of bridge in a traditional Chinese garden, visitors can find Claude Monet's *Water Lilies* on one side.

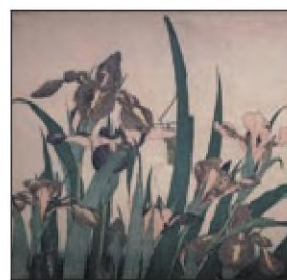
In 1906, the French art icon was mesmerized sitting by the pond in his own garden, making this moment immortal through his brush.

Across the lane, the Japanese *ukiyo-e* master Katsushika Hokusai's color woodblock print *Iris and Grasshopper* (1833-34) may explain his ideal garden and how his worship of nature influenced Monet and French impressionism. Both art pieces are from a collection at the Art Institute of Chicago.

An exhibited Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) rockery stone, named "cloud-embracing", reveals a favorite element in Chinese gardens; a bronze statuette *Neptune with a Dolphin* stands a few meters away. Once set atop a fountain in a villa of Rome, the statuette was made after Lorenzo Bernini's model and also



A section of the exhibition is designed with the setting of the Buddhist hall in the Qianlong Garden. JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY



Top: Key exhibits from overseas include *Iris and Grasshopper* by Katsushika Hokusai and *Water Lilies* by Claude Monet, both collected by the Art Institute of Chicago. PHOTOS BY WANG KAIHAO / CHINA DAILY
Above: A Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) album on court ladies in gardens collected by the Palace Museum. JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY
Below: Part of *Xiuxi*, a Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) scroll painting on the literati's annual springtime ritual. WANG KAIHAO / CHINA DAILY



provides an intriguing glimpse of a classical Italian garden.

"This initiative aims to integrate elements of literature, drama and historical allusions with landscape design, anchoring itself in Chinese classical gardens while embracing global garden cultures," says Wang Yuegong, deputy director of the Palace Museum.

"It initiates a dialogue that showcases the artistic splendor of Eastern and Western horticultural traditions, ultimately unveiling the humanistic philosophies embedded within these living masterpieces."

Through the artworks, the metaphysical thinking surrounding gardens may still resonate among modern viewers.

Soulful exploration

On a bright spring day in 353, a group of Chinese literati gathered in the Orchid Pavilion for a ritualistic cleansing ceremony known as *xiuxi*, often involving bathing, meditation and reflection.

They dedicated their poems to the harmony of nature and grandeur of the universe, and Wang Xizhi then created the calligraphic work *Preface to the Orchid Pavilion*, a monument in Chinese art history, also an everlasting classic of literature.

Literati throughout Chinese history tried to duplicate Wang's ultimately refreshing moment in their gardens.

In *Xiuxi*, an exhibited Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) painting, people are seen to hold the purification ritual by water to ward off misfortune. On another Ming painting *Jade Grotto Immortal Residence*, the artist incorporates a grotto, a symbol of the realm of paradise, in the garden to reveal a pursuit for reclusive living.

In Qianlong Garden, the emperor also ordered the construction of a pavilion to pay homage to that gathering in 353.

"The gathering deeply influenced a guiding mindset of gardening in China," Zhu explains.

"People want to highlight the

spirits represented by the natural landscape, in which they can nurture their virtue. Through designing, they reconstruct relations between humans and the landscape."

Such philosophical inspiration can also be seen in Western gardening.

An engraving by Albrecht Duerer in 1497 and a drypoint by Rembrandt in 1653, both on loan from Chicago, shared a theme focusing on a key theologian of early Christianity, Saint Jerome.

Contemporaneous with Wang Xizhi, the theologian is often portrayed either as a hermit engaged in ascetic practices in the wilderness, or as a scholar engaged in self-reflection. His image influenced the development of European garden art from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance and beyond, according to Zhu.

"Gardening is to explore an ideal habitat for souls," he says.

Fruitful interaction

In the world of gardening, the East and the West are not two separate chapters. Their interaction also led to extraordinary fruits, as the exhibition reminds us.

The copperplate engraving of the album of the Old Summer Palace shows how designers absorbed Baroque art and created the famous Grand Fountains and Western Mansion area in the Qing royal resort.

While a 1762 oil on canvas, *Kew Gardens: The Pagoda and Bridge*, offers a slice to see Chinese inspiration in British gardening, similar cases happened in Versailles, France, following Louis XIV's admiration for Chinese art.

Elisabeth Maisonnier, chief curator of heritage at the National Museum of the Palaces of Versailles and Trianon, says: "The influence of Chinese gardens was important, mediated by European visitors who brought back descriptions or sent paintings, especially of the gardens of the Forbidden City, where pagodas, pavilions, temples and Chinese houses can be found."

She continues: "The very design of Chinese gardens, miniature worlds where mountains and rivers are essential ... conceived as places of retreat and meditation, or pleasure and feasting for the close friends of the owner."

This year marks the centennial anniversary of the founding of the Palace Museum in the former imperial palace of China. In the name of gardens, the exhibition per se also seems to display the museum's international horizon and a bond for cross-border cultural exchange on the key occasion. About 70 exhibits come from overseas institutions.

"Museums offer us similar opportunities (like gardens) to bring objects from diverse cultures and civilizations together and spur a new, evolving vision of our world," says James Rondeau, president of the Art Institute of Chicago.

"I hope these seeds of exchange we plant today, through our joint efforts, would continue to blossom."

Stepping out of the galleries, people may understand what the exhibition curators really want to convey through the poster.

There, a group of Chinese literati from *Xiuxi* walks on the wooden arch bridge that spans across Monet's pond full of water lilies.

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LIFE



From left: Chinese singer-songwriter Chen Li, Chinese rock band Rebuilding the Rights of Statues, and singer-songwriter Phum Viphurit from Thailand will perform during the Strawberry Music Festival's upcoming edition in Japan this June, its first overseas destination.
PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Event organizers set for Japanese debut in sign of growing recognition, **Chen Nan** reports.

Music festival shows spirit of band of brothers

Shen Lihui can still vividly recall the moment when Chinese rock band Omnipotent Youth Society's trumpet filled the air at Central Park in New York in 2014. Standing there, it felt as though he had stepped into an American movie, weaving together a magical scene. Around him, New Yorkers jogged, read newspapers, and walked their dogs.

That moment occurred during Modern Sky's first overseas music festival in iconic Central Park. The event in 2014 blended Western and Chinese indie music, featuring an impressive lineup, including artists like Cat Power, Lenka, and Chinese bands like Rebuilding the Rights of Statues and Second Hand Rose. With 6,500 attendees — 60 percent from China and 40 percent from New York — Shen, the founder of Modern Sky, China's indie powerhouse, saw the event as a testament to the potential for cross-cultural musical exchange.

"A festivalgoer approached me and thanked me for bringing the event to New York. I'd never heard those words at our festivals in China," Shen recalls. "One person told me their friends had flown in from all over the United States to attend. That moment reinforced my belief that music has the power to unite people across borders."

In the ever-evolving entertainment landscape, Modern Sky, founded in 1997 in Beijing, has emerged not only as a dominant force in the Chinese music scene but also as an international player.

On June 6 and 7, Modern Sky's Strawberry Music Festival, one of China's largest and most influential outdoor events, will make its international debut at Yokohama's Red Brick Warehouse in Japan. This is the festival's first overseas destination, symbolizing China's growing musical influence.

On March 28, the first lineup was announced, featuring about 20 singers and bands from China, Japan and Thailand, such as Chinese singer-songwriters Chen Li, Zhao Lei, and Bangkok-based singer-songwriter Phum Viphurit.

"We view Japan as a critical gateway to the Asian music market," says Shen Yue, vice president of Modern Sky. "Through this expansion, we aim to connect Asia's music networks and provide a platform for Asian artists to reach global audiences. Our goal is to strengthen cultural exchange between China and Japan and offer more opportunities for artists from both countries."

Asia's music scene is gaining global recognition, with Japanese and South Korean pop culture resonating strongly with youth worldwide. The momentum is also building in Southeast Asia, and for Modern Sky, Japan serves as the ideal starting point for the Strawberry Music Festival's international journey.

Shen Yue says that while Japan and China each have massive music markets, they differ in key ways. Japan's music industry is known for its refinement, ranging from anime soundtracks to experimental indie scenes. In contrast, China's market, though still emerging globally, has become one of the world's largest, driven by the rise of local pop and indie music.

"Japan's music market is sophisticated, with a well-established infrastructure for events like music festivals," explains Shen Yue. "While China's market is still developing, Japan offers invaluable expertise in organizing large-scale events. We're eager to learn from their experience and integrate the best practices into our own operations."

What sets the Strawberry Music Festival apart from other Chinese music festivals is its blend of musical diversity, youthful energy, and cultural inclusivity. Known for its eclectic lineups, the festival spans genres from pop and rock to electronic and hip-hop. For its Yokohama edition, international artists from countries like China, Japan, South Korea, and Thailand will headline, transforming the event into a cross-cultural celebration of music and creativity.

Since its inception in 2009, the festival has been hosted in 49 cities across China, attracting over 8 million attendees by December 2024. Given Japan's status as the world's second-largest music market, it was a natural and strategic choice for the festival's first international expansion.

A significant challenge in entering a new market is building brand recognition, especially when the festival is still relatively unknown to Japanese audiences. To address this, Modern Sky has partnered with Avex Live Creative, one of Japan's leading entertainment companies. This collaboration, announced in 2024, leverages ALC's deep knowledge of Japan's music industry to ensure a smooth entry into the market.



Top: The Japanese band I Don't Like Mondays will perform at June's Strawberry Music Festival in Japan. **Above from left:** Chinese singer-songwriters Zhao Lei, DOUDOU, and Guo Ding will also perform at the festival, which will make its international debut at Yokohama's Red Brick Warehouse.



From top: Members of the rock band Rebuilding the Rights of Statues; the Japanese band I Don't Like Mondays performs at a music festival; audience at the Strawberry Music Festival.

Online
Scan the code to watch the video.

"We're working closely with ALC to guarantee the festival aligns with local tastes," says Shen Yue. "Our festival is about more than just music — it's a cultural celebration. We want to create an immersive experience that includes art exhibitions, creative markets, and workshops, reflecting each city's unique vibe. We aim to bring people together and offer something beyond music."

In terms of logistics, the festival is also focusing on multi-language support, local payment methods, and promotional materials in Japanese to ensure smooth interaction with the audience. "We've tailored our offerings to better suit Japanese tastes, from lineup selections to service delivery," Shen Yue adds. "We've considered local preferences and habits, ensuring that the experience feels both international and locally relevant."

Modern Sky's story is one of ambition and bold moves. Shen Lihui, the former lead vocalist of the Chinese rock band Sober, founded the company with the initial goal of distributing music by his own band and friends. What started as a small-scale operation quickly expanded.

In 2006, Modern Sky took its first step toward international expansion by opening a branch in New York. This was a risky yet audacious move. For decades, China's entertainment industry had focused primarily on its domestic market. Yet, the New York office became the foundation for Modern Sky's growing global presence. A few months after opening, the company's flagship band, Rebuilding the Rights of Statues, played at the prestigious South by Southwest Festival — known as SXSW — in Austin, Texas, marking their first major international exposure. The band toured across the US, introducing Chinese indie rock to American audiences.

In 2011, another key milestone occurred when Queen Sea Big Shark, another Modern Sky band, played at SXSW, further cementing the company's position on the global stage.

Between 2014 and 2017, Modern Sky expanded its reach to cities like Helsinki, Seattle, and Los Angeles. In 2015, the company invested in the Liverpool Sound City Festival in the United Kingdom. By 2017, Modern Sky had established a presence in the UK, signing local artists and earning nominations for Best Independent Label at the prestigious Music Week Awards for three consecutive years.

In 2024, Modern Sky reached another milestone with the opening of Modern Sky Japan. Shen Lihui announced the new venture at the 21st Tokyo International Music Market. Akinori Makino, general manager of Modern Sky Japan, emphasized the company's dual mission: to promote Chinese music in Japan and offer Japanese artists opportunities to engage with the global market.

"Through Modern Sky Japan, we aim to deepen our understanding of the Chinese market while promoting Chinese music in Japan," Makino says. "We also want to provide development opportunities to Japanese artists targeting the Chinese and global markets."

Shen Lihui adds: "We want to turn our Japan office into a content production center for Modern Sky." The Japanese branch will not only promote Chinese artists' performances in Japan, but also leverage Japan's production capabilities and visual elements to add a distinctive Japanese touch to Chinese musicians. At the same time, Modern Sky Japan will sign Japanese bands, using the company's global network to support their international promotion.

Modern Sky's international influence continues to grow. In 2024, Rebuilding the Rights of Statues toured China and Japan with Japanese alternative rock band Zazen Boys, marking the first time Chinese and Japanese bands performed together.

The years 2025-26 have been designated as China-Japan-Korea Cultural Exchange Year. Modern Sky plans to connect more industry resources, create new content, and offer more performance opportunities across the region, fostering cultural exchange and growth in Asia's music and entertainment industries.

For Shen Lihui, his goal for Strawberry Music Festival's edition in Japan is not just to sell tickets or turn the event into another commercialized festival. Instead, he sees it as part of a long-term strategy to internationalize Chinese music.

"New York's Modern Sky Festival was just the beginning of a larger effort, with the aim of building more connections. The Strawberry Music Festival is a new starting point. Our goal is to lead more Chinese artists to perform not just in Asia, but in Europe and globally," he says.

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